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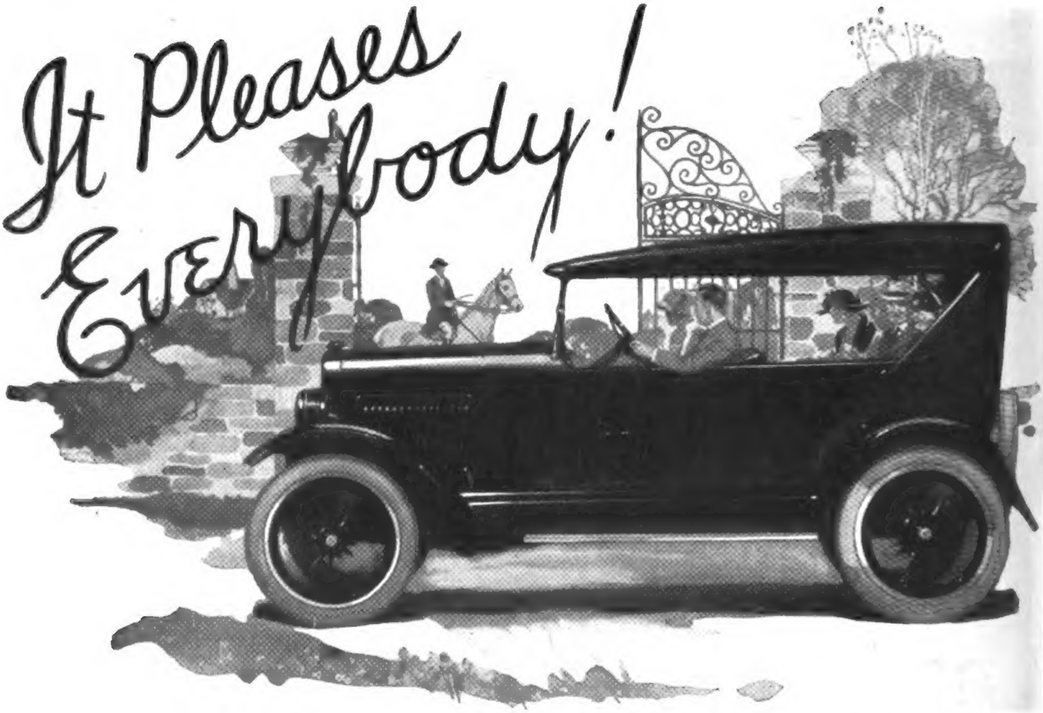
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Everybody's

NUMBER FOUR APRIL, 1924 VOLUME FIFTY

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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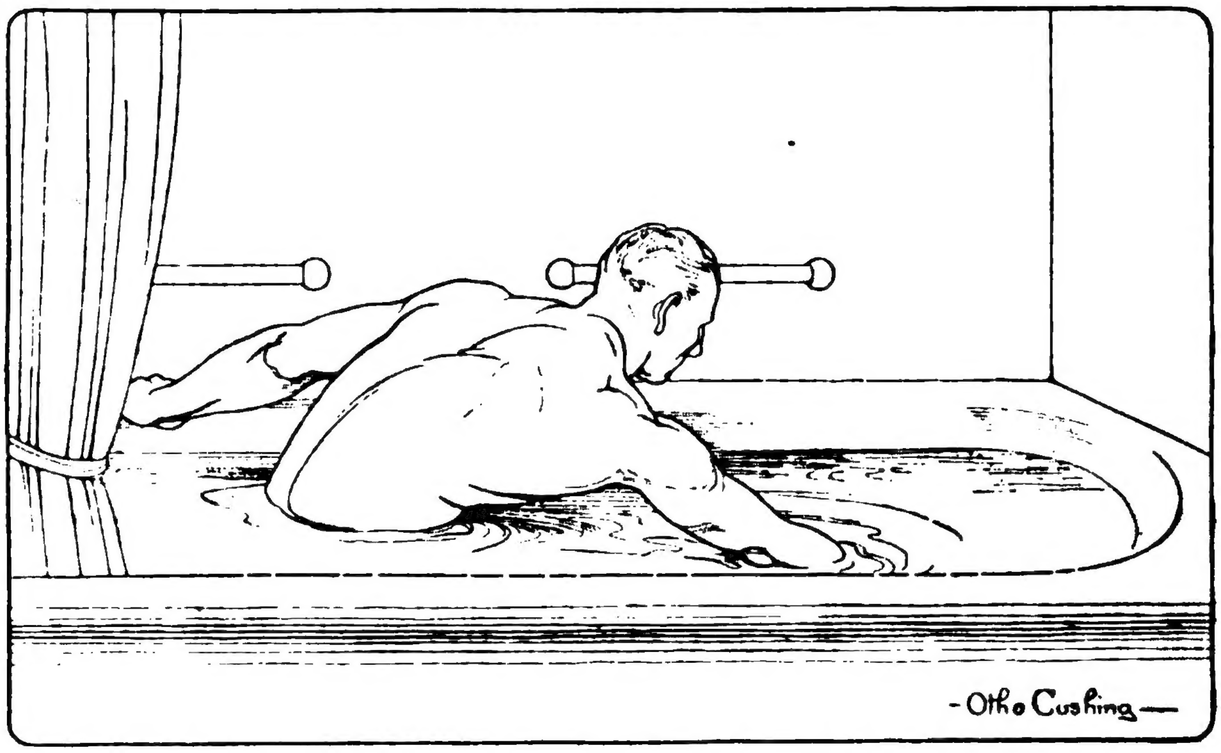
For soap-fishermen



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Everybody's

VOL. 50, NO. 4 APRIL, 1924 SEWELL HAGGARD, EDITOR

Beginning a Novel of Real Life

Bob Austin, Clean, Untarnished, and Gifted with Great Personal Charm, Is Captured by the Wrong Social Set and Drifts Nearer and Nearer the Blind Alley

Illustrations by W. G. Ratterman

One-Way Street

By Beale Davis

"YES, what is it, Manuel?" The man at the desk looked up, half impatient at the interruption.

"A telegram, Señor Austin."

"Take it to Mr. Sargeant in the code room. Telegrams must go first to him, always," Austin explained patiently.

"Sí, señor, but this one is for you personally. I thought—"

"Quite right you are this time, Manuel," Austin interrupted with a quick smile for the old porter who had occupied this post as far back as the days when the Embassy was a Legation. "Thank you. I'll ring if I want to send a reply."

The typewritten letters stood out boldly: "Robert Austin, American Embassy, Madrid."

With premonitory certainty, Bob Austin knew from whom it would be, and guessed its purport. The lines of his lips straightened, bringing his too-curving mouth more into accord with the severe regularity of his other features.

He drew a deep breath, and with quick nervousness tore open the envelope.

> Meet me at San Sebastian on Friday. I leave London today. Edward impossible. Have written fully. Love. SYLVIA.

So it had come! The thing he had dreamed of and had finally ceased to expect. Forgetful of the papers which five minutes ago had so engrossed him, he walked over to one of the windows, threw it open, and stood staring out into the quiet Madrid street. Yesterday he would have reveled in the softness of the wind which blew down from the snow-capped Guadarramas, its sharpness dissolved in golden midwinter sunshine. Now he was as unconscious of it as he was of the chatter of three little girls who skipped along the pavement beneath his window, their brief, frilly white skirts disclosing fat round legs, pink from the slight nip in the air.

Unnoticed, a cab, the driver half asleep, rattled slowly by, drawn by a skeleton horse, his drooping head and protruding ribs certain evidence that very soon he would receive Spain's reward. Any Sunday soon he might find himself blindfolded in the ring, waiting to be ripped open and tossed by a pain-maddened bull. With luck, he would be killed outright. If not, stuffed with straw, his belly sewed up, he would live until another Sunday and another bull ended a week of slow torture.

But none of the protest which the sight of these old horses always brought with it, came into Bob Austin's thoughts. His brain was filled with conjectures which the telegram had summoned there. The message could mean only one thing.

As if it were yesterday, he remembered his last conversation with Lady Sylvia Hutton on the night before he left England. The unexpectedness of his transfer had made it seem doubly hard; and in her revolt it was Sylvia who had brought up the subject which in the past she had very definitely banned—the subject of her divorcing Sir Edward.

"Now that the time has come for you to go, I don't believe that I can stand it," she told him. "This farce of being married to Edward can't keep up much longer. It's unbearable enough with you here. With you away! If I telegraph to say that I am coming to you, you will know that I mean that I have decided to have my freedom." Then she smiled—a twisted half-smile. "Or, maybe, that Edward has decided to have his."

A divorce! But what sort? Was Sylvia going to divorce Sir Edward—or was it the other way around? He feared—but why anticipate? Her letter would tell him. In the meantime he must arrange to meet her at San Sebastian on Friday. He frowned, stood undecided for a moment, then walked quickly across the room to the door which opened into the Ambassador's office.

"Come in, Austin," his chief said, looking up at the sound of the opening door. "Want to talk to me?"

"Yes, sir, for a few minutes, if you're not frightfully busy?"

"No, no. Sit down. What is it?"

Austin dropped into a chair beside the desk but for a moment did not reply to the question. There was so little explanation that he felt he could give for the request he had come to make.

While he waited, the Ambassador found himself trying, for possibly the hundredth time, to see the man behind the puzzling face that had caught and held his interest from the day, six months ago, when Bob Austin had arrived from the Embassy in London to take up his duties as First Secretary in the Embassy in Madrid.

It was an interesting face, arrestingly unusual. The broad forehead, straight jaw and deep-set, steady gray eyes all harmonized with each other and with the man's strong, long-lined body. Fair hair and skin which even in winter held a touch of golden tan strengthened the impression of wind and waves and a man, helmeted and bare-armed, in a ship's prow. A glance at the hands, and the impression vanished. Long and tapering, they were inconceivably blackened with tar and rope-calloused. But the mouth was even more irreconcilable. The long curving lines of the too-full lips bespoke passion and an extreme of sensitiveness which all the other features belied.

The result was a face as contradictory as had been its owner's career in England—a career which all the world of London-to-Paris-and-back knew of and still talked about. This in itself stamped Bob Austin as out of the ordinary—as a person possessing that indefinable something which compels and holds the world's interest. Without it, one may make an epochal discovery, commit a spectacular murder, overthrow a throne and be forgotten tomorrow. With it, the possessor's hay fever proves a topic of absorbing interest. One thing only is unattainable, and that is oblivion.

IT WAS the Ambassador who broke the silence. "What is it? Having trouble with that Moroccan report I asked you to whip into shape?"

Austin shook his head. "No, sir, it's about myself; I want to telegraph the

Department for a leave of absence, with your approval."

Surprise and disappointment were plain in the Ambassador's quick glance. For six months he had watched with satisfaction the change which had come over Austin. Arriving from London, he had taken up his duties with a perfunctoriness which spoke loud of a total lack of interest, but this had gradually given place to a keenness which justified the enthusiastic reports of his early work in London, on file in Washington. And now he wanted to quit his post. Was the reason behind the request the same one which had accounted for his loss of interest in London?

Sensing something of what was passing in his chief's brain, Austin continued: "I realize that this isn't the best time to be going on leave but I have just received a telegram which makes it a necessity. I've got to go."

The Ambassador made a quick decision. Until now he had never intimated how much he knew of his secretary's three years' stay in London. And it was not an easy subject to broach. But he looked up and faced Austin squarely.

"It's through no curiosity that I'm going to ask you a very personal question. Was this telegram you've just received from Lady Sylvia Hutton?"

The tinge of red which showed beneath the tan of Austin's face answered, and without waiting for corroboration the Ambassador continued:

"I've never mentioned the subject to you, for two reasons. One was that I considered it none of my business. The other was that I hoped that was an ended chapter. Now I've changed my mind. I've had a good deal of experience with life over here and also, I'm old enough to be your father. You're twenty-four, aren't you?"

"Twenty-five—just." Austin's face was expressionless.

"I've known Lady Sylvia and the set which surrounds her for a good many years."

Bob Austin winced at this. He hated to be reminded of the disparity in their ages. With Sylvia, he never felt it.

"What one has learned in an American university isn't of a great deal of use with the sophisticated lot one meets at her house in Grosvenor Street. And, Bob, under their sophistication, they're pretty shallow. That doesn't apply to Lady Sylvia herself; she's brilliant—but if I had a son of my own, she'd be the last woman in Europe I'd choose for him to know. Can't you manage, somehow, not to go? After all, there's every reason for your remaining at your post just now."

BOB felt no resentment at the Ambassador's words. Their six months' association had bred a very real respect and affection for his shrewd-eyed, companionable chief. But this was something the chief did not understand, and which he himself could not put into words. There was no one in the world to whom he could explain the relationship existing between him and Sylvia. Certainly not to this man of a past generation. He would never see it as they did—that her marriage to Edward Hutton was the great mistake that had clouded her whole life—that in each other he and Sylvia had found their ideals. And that now the barrier was to be removed. No, the chief would never understand, his twenty-five years decided—a conclusion that every generation reaches when its predecessor advises, ignorant that its own problems of man and woman are as old as human nature itself.

"I wish that I could discuss it with you fully," Austin answered. "But I can't, I'm sorry to say. I realize, too, that this is an unfortunate time to be leaving. Still I feel that I must go."

The Ambassador knew that it was useless to prolong the discussion. "Very well, then. I'll approve your request to the Department, of course. How long do you expect to be away?"

"I'm not at all certain. The telegram wasn't very definite. I'm expecting a letter, and won't know more until it arrives. I think, though, that I had better apply for the customary two months—I've had no leave for three years, you see—and if things turn out so that I can get back sooner, I will. It's possible that I'll be away only a few days."

"Very well. Get your telegram written and say that I approve the request."

"Thank you, sir." With his hand on the knob, Austin looked back. "I'm sorry that you disapprove of my going," he said, almost diffidently.

"'Disapprove' isn't exactly the right word. 'Regret' is a better one."

The Ambassador sat staring at the closed door after Bob went out. "Damn that woman," he said aloud.

Back at his desk, Bob Austin quickly scribbled off his message:

> With Ambassador's approval, respectfully request statutory leave of absence, to begin Friday next.
> AUSTIN.

WITH eager fingers Bob Austin ran through the pile of letters which he found on his desk when he arrived at the Embassy on Wednesday morning—his impatience bringing him there a good half hour earlier than his usual time. There was nothing from Sylvia. Tomorrow, no doubt, her letter would come. As best he could, he must forget his uneasiness. Surely it was groundless. Sir Edward had always been putty in Sylvia's hands.

He picked up a letter from Roland Scott, one of the secretaries in the London Embassy. It was just possible that there might be some mention in it of Sylvia. He glanced down the first page. On the next, Sylvia's name, half-way down the sheet, caught his eye.

> Dined with the Huttons a few nights ago. Lady Sylvia as beautiful as always and flattered me no end by putting me on her right. Can't imagine why I was so honored unless it was to ask me a dozen questions about you. She didn't seem very much pleased when I told her that I thought you wouldn't dare ask for a leave of absence for another six months anyhow.

Thursday's post brought no letter from Sylvia, and Austin went about his final arrangements for leaving as much in ignorance of what he would learn when he met her at San Sebastian as he had been when he read her noncommittal telegram three days before.

But there was nothing that he could do to enlighten himself. He had no idea where he could reach her in Paris, and he could not wait for Friday's post. To reach San Sebastian ahead of her, he must leave Madrid on Thursday night's Paris express. This would get him to his destination an hour head of Sylvia's train.

Luggage packed and sent to the station, he set out alone to dine at the Café Inglés. Unaccountably, he felt that tonight he was saying good-by to Spain—and he wanted to say it alone, and in Spanish surroundings. By imperceptible degrees the charm of this country—an anomaly in Europe—had grown upon him, despite the fact that here, as nowhere else in Europe, he felt himself a foreigner, an outsider, and realized that he knew the country really no better than any one of the harassed tourists, a herd of whom he occasionally met in the Prado, huddled before a Greco or a Goya, eyes glued to guide books, picture half looked at.

Enigmatical Spain. Its jewel-studded churches, starving beggars—days of sunshine, freezing nights—ox carts and automobiles—a fascinating medley of contrast and contradiction.

Inside the Café Inglés, Austin chose a table in a corner and after ordering his dinner, sat back and looked about him. This was Spain. Here was no suggestion of the noisy commercialism of the Palace restaurant or the noncommittal cosmopolitanism of the Ritz. From the walls, completely covered with gaily colored posters and pictures of matadors of days gone by, his eyes turned to the people at the other tables. Early as it was, the room was almost filled. All the people around him were Spanish. Here and there among them, he picked out a bull fighter, his profession advertised by the plaited lock at the back of his head. There was a great deal of color in the women's clothes and the air purred with the sound of liquid vowels.

His waiter, bringing a big copper basin heaped up with the rice *à la Valencia* which he had ordered, drew Austin's attention from the other diners and he began to play the game which this dish always inaugurated. With small-boy enthusiasm he set about discovering a new ingredient hidden in the steaming rice before him. Tiny sausages, lobster, chicken, peppers, all of these he had found before: that much of the secret of *arroz à la Valencia* he knew. Exploring the dish as well as eating it took more time than he realized and when he glanced at his watch it was almost train time. Paying his score, he hurried outside, hailed a cab and set out for the station, arriving just in time to go aboard.

ALMOST before the train, an hour late, stopped at San Sebastian, Austin alighted. But there was no need for haste. The express from Paris was also behind time and would not be in for another half hour. He sent his luggage on to the Maria Cristina and for thirty minutes, until Sylvia's train rolled in, paced up and down the platform.

An old man, two fat Spanish women, another man, alighted. More women and more men, but no Sylvia. Austin stood watching until the last of the arriving passengers passed by and went into the station. Sylvia had not come. Hoping against certainty, he waited until the express pulled out. Then he left the platform and walked slowly to the hotel. What did it mean, and what was he to do? There seemed to be only one thing: assume that nothing more serious than a missed train was the explanation and wait until the next day. Very much upset, he reached the hotel, inquired perfunctorily whether there was any message for him, then went to his room. With a long day before him, he dawdled over coffee and rolls, changed, then wandered out for a stroll along the tamarisk-bordered walk which overlooks the long, semi-circular beach.

The sky was overcast and the sapphire-blue sea of summer recollection was gray and oily. The monotonous roar of the incoming tide, creeping up to the line of half-dried seaweed, the high-water mark of its predecessor, got on his nerves. The wisdom of the step he had taken, for the first time, appeared doubtful. Would it not have been wiser to remain in Madrid until he knew more definitely why Sylvia had telegraphed him to meet her here? He put the thought aside. If circumstances had not made it imperative she would not have asked him to meet her. Her pleasure in his growing interest in his work at the Embassy, she had expressed in her letters more than once. And no longer than the week before he had written her of the possibility that the Ambassador would return to the United States for two months, leaving him as chargé d'affaires—not bad at twenty-five. No, no. Unless there was a real necessity for it, Sylvia would not have telegraphed.

With no one to talk to, nowhere to go, Austin went back to his room and threw himself across the bed; but no sleep came to blot out even one of the dragging minutes.

Sylvia divorced! Sylvia married to him—his wife! From the beginning she had so definitely put it out of the range of possibility that he had come to accept her verdict. What had occurred to bring her, so suddenly, to his position: that it was the thing which must be—which their love for each other demanded?

But had Sir Edward forced this decision on her? Was he going to divorce her? Austin tried not to think of it. The notoriety; the newspapers; their love for each other held up as a thing unclean—no, no, Edward Hutton would not do that. How could he? He had known and, condoning everything, had forfeited all right. Damn Edward Hutton's rights and the laws which gave them to him. His love and Sylvia's was a bigger thing than they—was above these laws made for the herd. He repeated to himself all of the specious arguments which on Sylvia's lips had sounded so convincing. Now, with the passage of six months dimming the picture of her which his memory held, they did not hold their old conviction. One fact would not erase itself—Sylvia was Edward Hutton's wife, and for two years he had been her lover.

NOT yet twenty-three, full of enthusiasm for what he erroneously imagined a life in diplomacy would be, Bob Austin had arrived in London the unconscious possessor of two attributes, without which his life in the city of stifled emotions would probably have been not unlike the eventless lives of dozens of other young diplomatists accredited to the Court of St. James's.

Of these two attributes, far the more arresting was the unexpected and refreshing cleanness of his outlook on life, which somehow had remained untainted with the half-baked sophistication and amusing cynicism of the youth of the day. Even in university it had not gone unnoted. Charged with aping Sir Galahad, he had explained awkwardly that it was the tawdriness and bald ugliness of the amorous adventures of his club mates which stifled any desire of his to add to his sex knowledge under the tutelage of bobbed-haired campus sirens or their more frankly mercenary sisters in the oldest of all professions. No one really understood his diffident explanations—which is not to be wondered at. But since in an American university an athlete can do no wrong, the idiosyncrasies of Bob Austin, halfback and captain of the football team and stroke on the crew, were wondered at and accepted.

The other asset—if asset it was—was the unusualness of his type of good looks: The cleanly modeled head, coin-clear profile and direct gray eyes added all that was needed to make Bob Austin a young man once seen, always remembered.

In retrospect, his first days in London always remained for him a confusion of new faces, unfamiliar duties—disappointingly free from secret conferences and momentous questions—and boring expeditions during dark winter afternoons in search of a flat with a Mayfair address and a suburban rental. There were so many uncounted expenses which his position demanded and which his salary from the Government fell so far short of covering.

Just as London society as a whole has Buckingham Palace for its center, so each individual clique revolves around some one person. The center of the one with which Austin became identified was Elizabeth Stuart.

They met in a Wednesday afternoon crush at the Embassy. Those Wednesday afternoons! Awful beyond words, they were: clattering teacups; strange names announced by a solemn-faced butler and stranger faces to which the names belonged; visiting diplomats; Mayfair and Park Lane; apologetic nondescripts; a few London notables; a sprinkling of attachés from other embassies; the Ambassadress, the Secretaries' wives, the Secretaries and the Ambassador himself doing their futile best to unify the company into something a little less like a gathering in a railroad station.

On the day that he met Elizabeth Stuart, Bob was particularly unfortunate. Arriving late after a very hard day at the Chancery, his first duty had been two tourist spinsters of indefinite age but most definite opinions regarding the discomforts of England.

His next half hour was devoted to listening to an opinion of European conditions which a Middle West Congressman had formed in his two weeks' stay, and which later would be repeated on the floor of the House for the benefit of those who had not been so fortunate as to study European conditions first-hand. So the afternoon went, from bad to worse.

A cautious glance at his watch told him that it was six o'clock. At six-thirty he had an engagement at the club, and he was on the point of slipping away when the Ambassadress caught his eye from across the room and beckoned him over to her. Wondering what next was in store for him and silently damning himself for being caught, he made his way through the thinning crowd.

"Come here. I want to introduce you to Miss Stuart," the Ambassadress said as he joined her.

Bob bowed and took the slender outstretched hand of the girl who stood at her side. Then he looked up and encountered a pair of very amused brown eyes, set wide apart in a smiling face framed in red-brown hair. The fixed, determinedly agreeable expression in his face disappeared behind a very infectious grin.

"I thought you were going to be another 'duty,' " he explained.

Elizabeth Stuart's answering smile told him that she understood. "I am, to the extent of asking for some tea. Can you bear having another woman ask you to get her some?"

"It's the first time this afternoon that one has. I've been too busy offering it to them and getting them out of the room to give them the chance. One dear lady is, I'm afraid, permanently parboiled inside. I hurried her so. But she would insist on telling me that the men at home were too busy working to have time to play at tea parties. Play! I ask you! I suppose that if I had told her that I was at my desk at nine this morning, she would have thought I was lying."

Elizabeth laughed. "Of course she would. Now run and get my tea and I'll try to make amends for her as best I can. I'll promise not to forget that stern duty alone is holding you here."

"You know I didn't mean—" Bob began, his face reddening with embarrassment.

Elizabeth laughed again. "Of course I do, silly! But it was too good an opening—from a diplomat, too. Now do get me my tea."

TEA brought, Bob sat down beside her to talk and altogether forgot his appointment at the club until she rose to go. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed, glancing at his watch. "Twenty minutes to seven and I promised to be at the club at six-thirty sharp."

"Which club?"

"St. George's."

"Come along then. My car is waiting. I'll drop you there."

The invitation was eagerly accepted, and on the way to the club Bob discovered that she was up in town for an out-of-the-season dance that night, one to which he had been invited and had no intention of going. At once he changed his mind.

Their meeting at the Embassy and again that night, at the dance, where they sat for a long time over supper, discovering no end of tastes in common and agreeably playable handicaps at golf, was the beginning of a very real friendship between Bob Austin and Elizabeth Stuart.

Other meetings in town followed, then week-ends at Cobworth, the Stuarts' country place. The people that he met there, the girls and young men who made up Elizabeth's set and older people, Edwardians, contemporaries of Sir Ralph and Lady Stuart, he liked immensely. The house took its tone from the older, rather than the younger people. Not that there was any great difference, but these older people still held to the ceremonies and little courtesies of a past period, when the grand manner was not a thing forgotten and boorishness was not esteemed a grace.

The life was as pleasing as the people. Luxury and outdoors combined in the perfect proportions of real English country life. Every one rode, and Bob himself managed to get in two or three days' hunting at the tail end of the season—riding Sir Ralph's horses. There was a good deal of golf. Every time that he and Elizabeth played he felt that today was the day he could give her half a stroke and win, and always found at the end that he couldn't—just.

It was a delightful three months. But between Elizabeth and himself there came no change in the original quality of their friendship. Bob realized that he had never known a girl as companionable as Elizabeth, and she made no pretense at hiding her liking for him. But there it ended. It was a friendship and nothing more.

It was by chance that Bob first saw Lady Sylvia. He and Scott, setting out to dine together at the club and then go on to a new musical show, concluded that the club was too dreary and decided on Claridge's instead.

Everybody's Magazine, April, 1924

While he stood in the door of the dining-room waiting for the maître d'hôtel to show them to a table, Bob saw her sitting with a man on the far side of the room. Just as they came in she looked up quickly and as quickly gave her attention again to the man with whom she was dining.

As Austin followed Scott to their table, three people bowed, and looked after him surprised when he did not return their greetings. But Bob Austin saw none of this. He was blind to everything but the dazzling picture in his brain. Purple-black hair—curving white throat, not the cold dead pallor of powder and cosmetics but white that was alive, creamy and transparent—and two amazing tawny eyes, all gold and onyx and—yes, there were emeralds, too, just a glint of them, eyes so brilliant that the rest of the face seemed negligible except as a setting for them.

"Who is she?" Bob demanded.

Scott's answer was another man's tribute to the extraordinary quality of her beauty. "Lady Sylvia Hutton," he replied without hesitation. Why ask which of fifty women in the room Austin referred to? There was only one Sylvia Hutton.

•

BOB AUSTIN would have been an even more abstracted dinner companion than Scott found him had he heard the question which Lady Sylvia asked the man with her, after her apparently unseeing glance toward the door.

"Who is the tall man who just came in with Scott?" she inquired of her husband, with whom, strangely enough, she had dined two nights running.

Before answering her question, he glanced toward the door. "His name is Austin, I believe. At the American Embassy. Good-looking, isn't he?"

"Very. I wonder," Sylvia continued, more than half to herself, "whether he's nearly as interesting as his face. But of course not. That expression in an American's face means no more than the madonna-look one sometimes sees in a Spanish dancer's. I don't suppose there's any man left in any country now who would live up to what that face suggests."

In her one quick glance at the face of the man in the door, her quick intuition—a good half of her reputed cleverness—had caught a hint of cleanness and illusions still retained. Her own were lost so far in the past that any one possessing them appeared correspondingly attractive—especially when the possessor was a man with disquieting grave gray eyes and a mouth which belonged to a faun.

Two nights later they met at dinner. Lady Audley, whom afterwards Bob was to come to know very well and dislike very heartily, was his hostess.

IN VIEW of her very informal and very late invitation over the telephone the day before, he was greatly surprised at the number of people he found in the drawing-room when the butler threw open the door to announce him. His surprise gave place to a distinct thrill of pleasure when he saw Lady Sylvia Hutton. This thrill became a stifling diffidence when he learned that he was to take her in to dinner. What colossal luck! That Lady Sylvia's chance sight of him two nights before and her "Do put me next to him" over the telephone the next morning, to Adèle Audley, explained the luck, of course he did not know.

Dinner reached the third course before he had an opportunity to talk to her. He could think of nothing but the most inane questions with which to demand her attention, all of which she was giving to the man on the other side of her. And Lady Sylvia showed no disposition to assist him.

On her part, the silence was from intention. Now that she had the opportunity of discovering whether her intuition about the man next her was correct she hesitated—preferring to defer what she felt sure would be a disillusionment.

"How do London and the other European capitals compare as diplomatic posts?" she inquired when at last she gave him her attention. She hoped that he was still young enough to be flattered at her assumption that he knew life in these cities.

"How do you know that I *am* in the Embassy?"

"I happened to be dining at Claridge's the other night and my husband pointed you out among other new arrivals in London since my departure last winter. What makes you want to know?"

Bob flushed a little. What a conceited fool he was to think that she had herself been curious about him! Still, it was rather nice that she had remembered his face at all.

The usual spasmodic dinner conversation followed. Afterward, Bob could remember very little of it and told himself angrily that he must have appeared a tongue-tied yokel. But for Lady Sylvia it was very illuminating and pleasing. A chance sentence of his corroborated her first instinctive judgment of him.

As even the best-intentioned dinner conversations will, theirs turned to the theater and the current plays. "Surface Deep" and its moot question—whether the inevitable two thirds of the triangle were justified in their novel and very unmoral disposal of the third—produced the hackneyed question: "And what's your opinion, Mr. Austin? Everybody seems to have one."

"I see no excuse at all for producing the play. I found it disgusting."

"But," Lady Sylvia laughed, "after all, the day of Victorian morals—even the adjective seems unnecessary—is very dead and very buried. What they did, under present-day codes, is no worse than——"

"You misunderstand me entirely," Bob interrupted. "It's not at all what they did, but how they did it, that I object to. I never considered the morals of it, one way or the other. No doubt the author professes to be aiming at realism. In my opinion he achieved very ugly crudeness—which I consider unpardonable."

Lady Sylvia looked at him keenly. "Do you look on life outside the theater with the same eyes, I wonder?"

Before he could answer, she caught her hostess' signal and rose from the table. "We must talk more of that later," she told him as she went out.

But the opportunity did not arise again that evening. Almost as soon as the men went into the drawing-room Lady Audley reminded them that it was time to go on to the ball for which her dinner party was given.

It was Bob's first big London ball in the season. The one disagreeable feature he discovered was the impossibility of even five minutes' uninterrupted conversation with any one half as popular as Lady Sylvia. But despite this, he enjoyed himself hugely:

the generous proportions of the ballroom and the big, flower-filled drawing-rooms; the perfect dance music, imported for the season from America; a rare dance with Lady Sylvia; the excellent champagne and equally bubbling conversation at supper, when she made a place for him at the already overfull table in one corner where she held court.

It was nearly four when he got to bed and, tired as he was, he found sleep an impossibility. Lady Sylvia's voice, the curve of her mouth when she smiled, the line of her shoulders—he could not get her out of his thoughts. She had remembered his face since Monday night, and this was Wednesday—two days. What had they talked about tonight? He could not remember but at the time it had been absorbing. On and on, backward and forward his thoughts carried him. Daylight slipped in through the windows and found him still awake.

In the days which followed they saw a great deal of each other. Dinners, balls and all the routine of life in the season accounted for some of it. The rest came through his efforts—and hers—which last, of course, he did not know. Sylvia's social legerdemain was much too finished for him to detect the moves.

THE third week end after their first meeting he spent at Brierly, the Hutton place in the country—and broke an engagement to go to Cobworth to do so. He felt rather ashamed of himself for this, and trusted that his excuse—detained in town by Embassy duties—would sound plausible, and hoped that his presence at Brierly over the week end would not reach the Stuarts' ears. Bob Austin was too new to London to appreciate the extreme unlikeliness of the latter. Although their big world of Mayfair was the same, the intimate worlds of Sylvia Hutton and Elizabeth were separated by an impassable chasm, the code of the Edwardians.

On Monday after the Brierly week end, Bob returned to London undecided as to whether he had enjoyed it or not. No, that was not it exactly. He had enjoyed himself immensely, but he was not certain whether he wanted to go again. The bridge, for one thing. If the expression "customary stakes" had meant at Brierly what it had in other houses where he had visited, he would not have been surprised as he was at the size of the check he received for his winnings when the "washing book" was settled after the game Sunday night.

The only thing to do, he decided, was to play again and give opponents a chance to win. If this happened, he could decline to play afterward. Yes, that was best. He would make a special account in bank and as long as it lasted, he might as well play. Certainly less embarrassing than explanations. And the people—the other week-end guests? Those veiled suggestions; a disagreeable undercurrent of secret understandings! No, he was sure he did not like it.

Lady Sylvia herself had been perfect. They had walked together—long walks in the late afternoons—sat together outside in the starlight and talked. How much of himself he had shown her in these intimate conversations in the darkness, he had no idea. Unwittingly his almost boyish reserves, evasive references to facts which she was accustomed to see frankly paraded, had erected before Sylvia's eyes, better than words could have done, the little shrine which every man builds when he is young. Knowing—as he did not—that the shrine would be dedicated to her, and knowing herself, she hesitated for a moment, seeing the wreck it would all become when once it was done. A glance at the man on the balustrade beside her and the impulse passed. Clean youth and ideals were offerings which for a long time her beauty had not received.

Bob's doubts, after all, were Monday-morning doubts. That night he saw Sylvia and at once forgot them and that the week end had been anything but altogether delightful, to such a degree that when she said, "Would you like to come down to Brierly next week end—not a big party—just you, myself and a few other people?" he accepted without a second thought.

He had planned to leave the Embassy early on Saturday, but a long cablegram from the State Department which required immediate attention, was brought to him just as he was leaving at noon.

Keenly disappointed, he called Lady Sylvia on the telephone and told her the circumstances. She would not consider having him postpone his visit.

"But I'm afraid that I can't possibly make the last train," said Bob.

A petulant exclamation from the other end of the wire, and then:

"I have it. Edward is in Paris, and his car and chauffeur are idle in town. They can run you down after you've finished your stupid chore."

Bob had protested, but weakly, and at eight-thirty Hoskins was before the door of the house in which was Austin's flat of great discomfort and impeccable address.

Lady Sylvia had told him there would be only a few people. He hoped she had not changed her plans. Everything which obtruded to prevent his being alone with her irritated. He knew that he was in love with her and had been from the first. About this, he felt no trace of guilt. No one should ever know it. She was another man's wife and it was a love that could never be expressed. But it was beautiful, and the fact that it must always be denied expression made it doubly dear, and divested it of all that was physical. It was as if in her he had found the physical representation of all the ideals which had taken form as early in his life as ideals of women began to shape themselves in his boy's brain. It was nothing which any one could cavil at—this love of his. It was the undemanding love for something high above him, unattainable and very perfect.

It seemed that almost no time had elapsed when the run was ended and the lights from the windows of Brierly were shining at the end of the tree-shadowed driveway.

The automobile stopped before the house and the door was thrown open by the butler. As he walked in, Bob was surprised at the quiet. There was no hum of conversation. Every one deep in bridge, of course. At the open door of the long room where the previous week end they had played their nightly bridge games, he stopped in surprise. The room was empty.

"Where is every one?" he demanded of the butler, who had followed him.

"Every one has gone up, sir. There are only her Ladyship, Mrs. Hamilton and Captain Cavendish. Can I get you something to drink, sir?"

"Yes, a whisky and soda, and then I suppose I might as well go up myself. Where am I?"

"The same room that was yours last week end. Shall I show you?"

"Oh, no! I can find it all right. I'll sit down here for a few minutes."

OVER his drink, Bob fell to wondering. Nobody but Sylvia, Vera Hamilton and Cavendish. Strange. He thought certainly there would be a few more. Vera Hamilton and Cavendish! The week end before there had seemed to be between them . . . Rot! He had a filthy mind even to imagine.

Ten minutes later, very quietly so as not to disturb the sleeping house, he mounted the broad stairs and walked down the hall toward his room.

"Is that you? Come in and speak to your hostess." The voice came from inside an unlighted room, the door of which stood ajar.

Bob knew this room, a corner one overlooking the rose garden. Reluctantly he stopped. The very intimateness of the room made him hesitate. There was something of the delicate modesty of a boy in his indecision. He even considered the feasibility of pretending that he had not heard, but all the while a glow of pleasure at seeing her before the morning urged him to go in.

Again she spoke, very softly, and he turned and went inside. Without knowing what held him, he stopped still in that doorway. For one flashing, infinitesimal fraction of time the overpowering necessity to get away, to get away anywhere outside that room gripped him. As quickly as it had come, the impulse passed.

Dressed in a clinging kimono of pale shimmering gray silk, on which sprays of embroidery lay like black shadows on silver sand, her hair wound in a soft, inky coronet about her head, her eyes deep gold in the gloom, Sylvia looked the materialization of the moonlight which flooded over her as she sat on a big, dark couch placed in the bow window which overlooked the blossoming garden.

She rose from the couch and came forward to meet him. The sleeve of her kimono dropped away from her bare arm as she took his hand and with an upward smile from beneath the straight lashes which fringed the topaz eyes led him to a seat beside her on the couch at the window.

Neither spoke for a long time. He could not. She, because she was Sylvia Hutton, did not. The scent of the dew-drenched roses outside mingled intoxicatingly with the perfume of the woman beside him. Her nearness drove coherent thought away. He drew a deep, uneven breath.

"What is it?" Sylvia's voice was scarcely louder than the breeze which swayed the trees outside into a slow, rhythmic unrest.

"Nothing—everything," Bob whispered. Every fiber in him ached to tell her that he loved her—that no other woman had ever so stirred him—that she was the first, the only woman in his life. But his code, his own and that of his father before him, forbade. He must get away. With each passing second the moment of the mastery of his senses drew nearer. And he was afraid. He must get out of this room—away from the perfume and the moonlight and the woman he wanted so passionately—and as passionately did not. Above all he must escape from the smile of infinite wiseness which lured him and repulsed him at once.

Abruptly, almost roughly, he rose from his seat beside her. "I'm going. Good night." His voice was thick with warring emotions. Now that he was leaving, more than anything else in the world he wanted to stay. But he was afraid—afraid of himself and the domination of his senses. But especially he was afraid of misreading the cryptic meaning in the eyes of the woman wrapped around in thin clinging silk. Go, before he either misread or read aright.

He took one stumbling, blind step toward the door. Sylvia reached out her hand and drew him back to the couch beside her. Her touch burned through his sleeve. He was trembling. Every muscle twitched uncontrollably.

Almost imperceptibly she leaned toward him. Her head was thrown back, her face was lifted, and the moonlight caught the melting softness in the tawny eyes, and the compelling invitation of parted, geranium lips.

His self-control snapped. The blood from his pounding heart beat deafeningly in his temples. Past and future were blotted out in the surge of passions which enveloped him. The present was ablaze with the thrilling consciousness that he was a man—alone in the moonlight with the woman he loved. No single word was spoken. His arms strained her yielding body close, crushing it against his own, vibrant with the arrogant strength of youth. Brutal in its eagerness, the curving pagan mouth sought her woman's lips, and found them, fragrant and no less eager than his own.

And so it was that, in the end, his sense of the beautiful betrayed Bob Austin into a one-way street where, save in the veriest externals, there was more ugliness than in any of those from which this same fastidiousness had always guarded him.

Not that he saw the ugliness. Sylvia had read him too well to permit that: and in the first wild exaltation of his passion—in his wonder at what he believed to be the great love of his life, and of hers—it was pitifully easy for Sylvia to cover the reality of her world, as ugly as a malformed naked body, under a deceptive veil of meretricious sophistry.

THROUGH this veil, its warp and woof his youth and his passion, he saw that love was above all law. This admitted for himself and Sylvia, he must admit it for the others of her world.

In little things as well, he saw new lines and new distinctions. Bridge was a business proposition. One played to win and not for the pleasure of the game.

"Really, dear," Sylvia told him, "it's almost self-righteous to consider it anything else—especially as you play a marvelous game."

Bob listened and all plans for a separate bank account were abandoned. Instead—thanks to a little luck and a great deal of skill—he took an apartment of Sylvia's choosing in St. James's Street and had a servant to lay out his clothes.

Week ends at Cobworth grew more and more infrequent and finally ended altogether. The old Tudor house and its air of Edwardian elegance and reserve lost its charm in the super-modernism of Brierly—and his friendship with Elizabeth Stuart became purely theoretical.

His work at the Embassy and the inconveniently long hours he put in there, Sylvia laughed at, citing the salary he received as proof that his Government viewed the importance of diplomacy with the same seriousness. "If Ambassadors and Secretaries were expected to work, they would be paid accordingly—certainly by your country which judges everything, from the merit of a picture to the blood which runs in your veins, by nothing but dollars and cents."

Eventually, even Sylvia could not cavil at the amount of time Bob gave in exchange for the two thousand dollars he received from Washington.

But none of this came about in a day or a week or a month. It was a process of slow change and the metamorphosis of Bob Austin, a young man intent on a career ahead, into Bobby Austin, decorative, charming and altogether irresponsible specimen of the genus diplomat, did not occur overnight.

By easy steps Sylvia led him down the highway of her world, permitting him to see each new distortion only when his eyes were accustomed to the last. He, infatuated, followed where she led—and his eyes, always turned to her, were never on the road ahead.

Every one else saw the inevitable end—and what he would be when he reached it. The Ambassador saw last of all, but when he did, a hint to Washington and immediate transfer orders to Spain were the consequences.

Six months in Madrid did much to remove the poison of infatuation. Another six months and the danger would have been past. Then came Lady Sylvia's telegram.

THE red glow of the setting sun faded to gray and then to black, but Bob Austin, stretched across the bed, did not move until the imperative tinkle of the telephone bell dragged him from his reverie.

"Well?" he said, still in a half-doze of retrospect.

"Mr. Frederick Carstairs is calling," he heard the voice of the commissionnaire saying.

"Carstairs? You've made a mistake. I don't know any Mr. Carstairs."

"One minute." Silence and then: "Mr. Carstairs says that he is one of the party aboard the Hamilton yacht that has just anchored in the harbor."

"Ask him to come up," Bob answered, and, puzzled, hung up the receiver.

What the devil did this mean? The Hamilton yacht! The only Hamiltons he knew were Vera and her very tiresome husband, the Honorable Charles. Bob knew that when Charles Hamilton went for a cruise on the *Mary T.* his wife usually was not one of the ladies of the party. Ordinarily Miss Mary Tremaine of the Frivolity chorus played hostess aboard her namesake. How could any of that party know he was at San Sebastian?

There was a knock, and in answer to his "Come in," the door was thrown open and a strange young man stepped into the room. Even before he spoke Bob disliked him. His hair was very yellow, his face was very white, his clothes very correct and very well-fitting. Everything about the young man was as "very" as Bob's adverse estimate.

"I'm Freddy Carstairs and you're Bobby Austin. I'd recognize you anywhere from pictures of you I've seen," the weedy young gentleman announced as he crossed the room, hand outstretched, finger-nails and stones set in the two rings on his little finger equally brilliant.

Bobby! It was the first time that Austin had been called anything but Bob for six months and he realized that he disliked it—certainly coming from Carstairs.

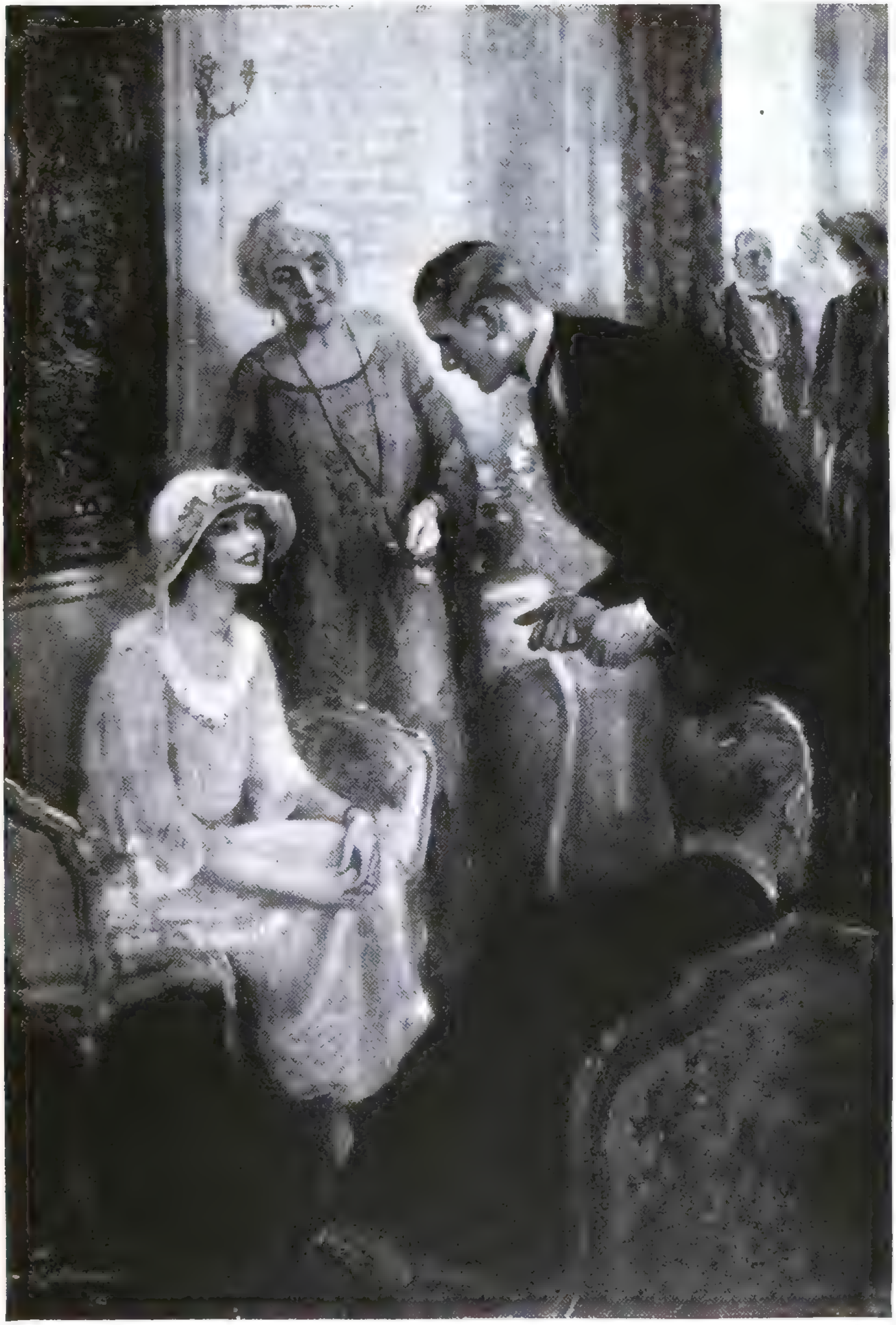
"Vera and Sylvia sent me ashore to bring you out. There are a couple of men from the yacht downstairs who will see to your luggage."

Sylvia aboard the Hamilton yacht! The unexpectedness of it drove its full meaning from his brain. The one thing that he realized was that he was furious. What an intolerable position to be put into! He had considered no possibility other than that he and Sylvia would meet here alone and, with no one's knowledge, discuss and arrange the future. One thing was certain! He would ask for no enlightenment from this young man.

"I'm ready," he said. Luckily almost nothing was unpacked. "Shall we go?"

On the way to the landing where one of the yacht's boats was waiting, and until their launch ran alongside the white hull of the *Mary T.*, Austin talked little, but his occasionally interpolated questions steered Carstairs's incessant babble into informative channels.

Besides himself, Sylvia, Vera, Charles Hamilton and Mrs. Brinton, an American, made up the party. A nastily suggestive smirk which momentarily replaced Freddy Carstairs's grin when he coupled the last two names together, was unmistakable. They had sailed on Tuesday and Monte



Elizabeth laughed. "Now run and get my tea and I'll promise not to forget that stern duty alone is holding you here."

Carlo was the yacht's final destination. It was evident that Carstairs assumed that Austin was to be the third man for the rest of the cruise and the stay on the Riviera.

Bob smiled in the darkness at this. He would go aboard, and if he discovered he had misread the meaning of Sylvia's telegram would disembark at Gibraltar and return to Madrid. But this would not be the case, he told himself. Much more likely Sylvia had used this yachting party as an excuse to leave London and come to Spain without exciting comment.

As he stepped aboard the yacht, Vera Hamilton came quickly across the lighted deck to greet him. She held out both hands. "Bobby! I can't tell you how very delighted I am to see you, and how wonderfully well you're looking. Don't start looking over my shoulder. There's no one else on deck. You might pretend anyway that you're glad to see your hostess, and not at once begin looking wildly about before you've even done your manners."

"Ah, Vera dear, it's because I have such faultless manners that I was looking anywhere but straight at you. I was looking to see if my host, too, wasn't somewhere about to be spoken to next." How unexpectedly easy the old bantering tone came back!

"If you are possessed with an overpowering desire to see Charles, you and Mrs. Brinton will have something in common to begin with. There! You always make me say the most terribly impolitic things. Come and get a cocktail before I say any more. And put your mind at rest: Sylvia is dressing. No doubt she'll be here in a few minutes."

VERA led the way across the deck. "Here is everything you'll need, I think. I refused to allow any one to mix them before you arrived. Since you've been away from London, there hasn't been a man who could make a decent one."

"Oh, I say! That's a nasty one, as I've been mixing them ever since we've been aboard," Carstairs put in.

"I said a man, Frederico darling," Vera drawled.

"And what am I, please?"

Vera looked at him with a slow smile. "An American would say a cake-eater. In England, as you know, everybody calls you the Dowagers' Delight. In France—since you don't speak a word of French you wouldn't understand their little name for you if I told you. So I won't. My own particular for you, you know: the world's worst bridge player. You're a dear Freddy, but as a bridge partner you're a luxury I can't afford."

Then she turned her attention to Bob. "Why so quiet? You haven't said a word. Tired from your trip, or sulking because you're disappointed that it's me that rushed out to greet you and hold your hands?"

Bob smiled mechanically. Everything was just as it had been when he left it six months before. As easily as if it were the day before, the old flippancy returned to his conversation and Vera's held the same suggestion that was never five minutes out of her words. Somehow it jarred.

"I am tired," he said. "Arrived early this morning and spent a long rainy day alone."

"I suppose Freddy has told you who's aboard?"

Bob nodded. "When did Mrs. Brinton become one of your friends?"

"It was entirely Charles's idea to have her come along." Vera's smile and shrug said plainly that Mrs. Brinton, and not the *Mary T.'s* namesake, was occupying Hamilton's attention for the moment. This was surprising. Mrs. Brinton had seemed of a different sort when he had met her at occasional London parties. But what accounted for the presence of Freddy Carstairs and that vapid grin? Why was he on the yacht? Later, when he asked Vera, she told him that his bank account and atrociously bad bridge made him an addition to any game—for his opponents.

Sylvia, meanwhile, suddenly apprehensive, was making, even for her, an unwontedly careful toilette. Would six months' absence have cleared Bob's vision, or would he still see her as she had been when he first knew her three years before? Would this separation have dimmed the picture of her that he had carried through all the London days? She would take no chances. Better assume that his eyes were keener and be prepared.

There were two people, and only two, in the world—Sylvia herself and Dr. Forbes, the London beauty specialist—who knew how deeply in the last three years Time had pinched tiny wrinkles in her throat and lids and rubbed the bloom from her skin. Lady Sylvia Hutton was the great outstanding proof of his mastery of his craft. But he knew, and Sylvia knew, that the day could not be postponed indefinitely when even he would be powerless to erase the telltale marks. That day Sylvia anticipated with rebellious terror; the day when she would be the woman who had been beautiful.

She was slipping into her dress when Vera Hamilton came in.

"Bobby's aboard," Mrs. Hamilton announced, her eyes resting approvingly on the woman before her. If it was Sylvia's desire to be more than commonly beautiful tonight, she had her wish, she decided.

"What's he like—sulky?"

"No-o, not exactly, but very quiet and puzzled. And it seems to me, Sylvia, that he has changed a bit, too. It may be all my imagination, but these last six months in Spain seem to have made him more—" Her voice trailed off as she sought, unsuccessfully, the needed word to describe the man she had left on deck.

Sylvia nodded. "I understand. I rather expected that. Listen, Vera. I don't want him to have an opportunity to talk to me alone until a good deal later tonight."

Mrs. Hamilton laughed knowingly. "That sounds like me arranging one of my delightful heart-to-heart talks with Charles. I always manage it so that a good dinner and a lot of champagne precede. But it would never have occurred to me that you needed to use husband methods on Bobby."

Sylvia shrugged. "Don't deceive yourself, dear. Husbands or lovers, they're men just the same. Any fool can catch them but there's one woman in a thousand who can hold them once they're caught."

WHILE the two women were discussing him, Bob sat on deck sipping his cocktail and listening to Freddy Carstairs, his original instinctive dislike for that young man becoming more firmly rooted as he did so. Had those six months in Spain, out of the atmosphere of Sylvia's Grosvenor Street house and the decadent lot who filled it, made any change in him—or would Carstairs have been equally objectionable had he met him then? And there was Vera. In the old days her attitude toward her husband's by no means secret attachments to various ladies of the chorus had seemed only amusing—when she laughed at them and objected not at all so long as Hamilton's interest was sufficiently well held to insure her own freedom. Now—yes, it did grate—her shrug and smile when Mrs. Brinton's name was mentioned.

A sentence of Carstairs's forced Bob's attention. "Lucky we are to have Sylvia with us." Bob hated his calling her Sylvia—impudent little rat! "She came at the last minute, as of course you know. Until then she was all for that American trip with Blanche Moseley. She and Blanche rowed over something—Blanche's young man, probably. Anyway, we got Sylvia."

Before Bob had an opportunity either to answer or to appreciate fully the meaning of this bit of information, Charles Hamilton and Mrs. Brinton came out on deck.

"Hello there. Glad to see you aboard," Hamilton called out.

"Thanks. Glad to be here," Bob answered. "And how are you, Mrs. Brinton?" he demanded, shaking hands with the slender, too-pale American woman.

Like the vague memory he had retained of her in London, the woman before him did not at all fit the rôle which Vera had suggested. But it was evident that Charles Hamilton was playing the devoted. Bob felt a little shudder of distaste.

"I wonder whether there'll be time for me to change for dinner—or shall I go in just as I am?" he inquired of his host.

"Oh, no! Don't change. We're only waiting for Sylvia. As soon as she comes we'll go straight in, but God only knows when that will be."

"By the way," said Austin, "where do we put in next? I'd like to send a line to the Ambassador."

"Gibraltar, and from there to Monte, as fast as we can make it."

"Thanks. If I may, I'm going to scribble a note and get you to send it ashore before we sail."

"Certainly. You'll find paper and ink inside. Get your note written and we'll send it in at once."

Bob sat for five minutes at the desk before putting a word on the blank sheet before him. His decision made, he rapidly wrote a few lines to the Ambassador, telling him that he might expect him back within a week. That would allow time for a stay aboard until the yacht reached Gibraltar and the train journey to Madrid. It would also avoid the comment and explanation which must follow if he left the yacht at once and returned from San Sebastian to Madrid.

The letter sealed and addressed, he went back on deck, to find that Sylvia and Vera had not yet joined the others.

As Hamilton took the letter, a steward came out and announced dinner.

"We're waiting for Lady Sylvia Hutton," Hamilton told the servant.

"Her Ladyship and Mrs. Hamilton are inside, sir."

EVEN before he spoke to her, Sylvia Hutton's beauty began to work its undiminished charm over Bob Austin. With the dark-paneled walls of the room as a background, lighted by the soft glow of the unshaded candles on the dinner-table, her bare arms and neck above the low line of her flame-colored dress glowed camellia-white. There was almost softness in the tawny eyes as they welcomed him. The brilliant smile of pleasure was genuine.

"I *am* glad to see you, Bobby," she said, her voice even more huskily soft than he remembered it.

He smiled as he took her outstretched hand, and the edge of the anger he had felt until this moment became suddenly dulled.

After dinner Hamilton and Mrs. Brinton withdrew for a game of piquet, leaving the others to their inevitable bridge. For two hours they played. Then after a fourth rubber Sylvia declared that she had had enough for one day. "Come, Bobby, let's go out on deck for a minute. I must have a bit of fresh air. There's an awful frowst in here."

Eager for their deferred conversation and to be alone with her, Bob followed Sylvia outside. Now he would know. The tormenting uncertainties of the last days were at an end.

The yacht had got under way and the deck lights were all extinguished. Sylvia led the way through the darkness to a sheltered corner. Before he could frame even his first words she turned and faced him. Vera's hint, and a disquieting expression she had more than once surprised in his eyes, warned her that a great deal depended on the coming conversation, and that she must move carefully.

"I thought we'd never manage a minute alone. There's so much to talk about. Come, let's sit on this bench here out of the wind."

In the thick darkness his arms went about her. She could not see his face, but his arms and his kisses told her that for him she was still the one woman. With that certain, the rest was easy. This was the Bobby she knew.

"Bobby darling—I've a confession to make. No, I don't want to look at you, even in the dark, while I tell you." She nestled closer to him, lowering her head. "I knew what you would think when you got my telegram. I did it on purpose. I was afraid that unless I did, you wouldn't come. And I had to see you, darling. I couldn't stand it another day. Are you terribly angry with me?" All the helpless appeal that she could muster she put into her voice.

"You mean that it's not to be—not to be a divorce?"

"Yes. . . . Not yet."

"But, sweetheart!" he began. Now that he was with her—had seen her again and held her in his arms—all the revolt of the first days of his love rose up again.

"I know that I shouldn't have telegraphed you," Sylvia interrupted him. "But these six months have been so tragically long. When you left to go to Spain, I never dreamed it was going to be so hard. I thought I'd forget—or become accustomed to it." Sylvia was a good enough actress to believe her own words—almost.

His arms tightened about her reassuringly. "Don't you see, dear, that all this goes to prove what I've always said—that a divorce is the only thing?" His voice was full of hopeful appeal.

"Not tonight, Bobby darling. We'll talk of that some other time. Tonight let's be happy because we've got each other, and forget the hopeless tangle that everything seems to be. Hold me tight and tell me that you love me—love me as much as you always have. We've days and days to talk about the other. It may be that you're right and that it's the only way. This separation has been ghastly. Tonight I want to forget it. There's plenty of time ahead."

"Not so much. I must leave the yacht at Gibraltar and go back to Madrid."

Sylvia smiled in the darkness. The tense arms about her and the warmth of his eager kisses which still lingered on her lips told another story.

It was a long time after Vera's "Good night, star-gazers," had drifted out to them through the lighted doorway, that Sylvia suggested that it was time to go inside. "It's late, Bobbykins; we'd better go in," she said, smoothing his rumpled hair. "All the others must have gone to their rooms ages ago."

"I don't know where mine is."

"I do. I'll show you." She led the way to the last room at the end of the narrow passageway. "This is yours."

"And yours?" Bobby whispered.

Sylvia smiled over her shoulder as she opened the door opposite his—and was very certain that he would not leave the yacht at Gibraltar.

ASTERN, the dark bulk of Gibraltar was fast dropping below the distant horizon as the yacht steamed through the blue Mediterranean. Stretched out lazily in a long deck chair, Bob Austin sat alone and watched the great rock as it crept down to hide itself under the edge of the world.

Unheard, Sylvia came on deck and, noiselessly crossing its scoured whiteness, stood behind him. Her eyes on him, an elusive softness came into her face. In that unguarded moment, when her face betrayed the real woman, her eyes were old and haunted by the knowledge that she had committed the supreme folly. She loved this man. In the beginning she had not intended this, but his fresh cleanness had stirred emotions which she had imagined deep-buried under years of sophistication and experience. What she had embarked upon as an amusing episode had become a situation. This she should never have permitted. For he was twenty-five and she was—well, she was old enough to know better.

No one better than Sylvia knew that there is nothing which the world so enjoys chuckling over as the comedy of the old woman—wife or mistress—struggling to hold a young lover. Unless the woman is very clever and possessed of a dignity far beyond the ordinary the comedy becomes farce and the world's chuckles turn to uproarious merriment at the girlish simperings of mutton dressed as lamb.

All this, and more, was in Sylvia's eyes as she stood behind the chair. Then it passed. Absurd to look so far into the future. It would be a long, long time before the world could even covertly smile at Sylvia Hutton. Now she was youth itself. No, better still, she was ageless—as flawless beauty always is.

"What are you doing out here all alone, Bobbykins? Regretting that it's a letter and not you, that's on its way from Gibraltar to Madrid?"

Startled out of his daydream, Bob tilted his head still further back and looked up at her with a welcoming smile. "No. I couldn't regret anything on a day like this. I believe beauty drugs me—my brain goes numb and I can't think. I know that, right this minute, I should be feeling a lazy quitter for not going back to Madrid. Instead, I feel nothing of the sort."

This was the mood for which Sylvia had been waiting ever since Bob joined the party at San Sebastian. All her cleverness and charm had been enlisted to bring it about. But for all of it, she would have failed and Bob would have held to his purpose of returning to Madrid if she had not known him a great deal better than he knew himself. Where others had seen only weakness, she had discovered the wilful strength which the curving mouth had betrayed.

Now that he was in the desired mood, very adroitly, no matter what topic they touched, she managed to bring England and London into their talk. Very deftly she brought the life he had known there before him, stressing only the things which she knew held the most appeal for him.

Then Sylvia put her question: "Would you like to go back to it, Bobby?"

"More than anything I know. But I couldn't expect to be lucky enough to have London so soon again. Everybody in the Service wants a London appointment. They would hardly give it to me twice."

"Yes, I see that, but that's not what I mean. If something worth while in the City were offered you—say a good post in one of the big banking houses—would you chuck diplomacy and come to London to stay?"

Sylvia was a little surprised and distinctly nettled at his reply.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "It depends on a lot of things. And, besides, I'd hate to give up the Service."

"I must say," Sylvia observed crisply, "I don't see why. If your Service were a real one, like European ones, and led to something definite, I might understand. But it isn't. It's neither one thing nor another—part politics, part civil service. The one definite thing is that it's terribly expensive. You spend the best years of your life learning your profession, wandering about the world with no say as to where or when you go, and in the end you're appointed Minister or Ambassador. Then what happens? A new party comes into power in America and you're out."

"Yes. There's a lot in what you say. But on the other hand there are reasons for my staying away from London."

"For example?"

"You are the chief one."

SYLVIA knew what was coming. As well have it out now as another time.

"Just what do you mean?"

"I mean that I don't want to be there and have to see you the wife of Edward Hutton. If I came back would you divorce him?"

Sylvia was more exasperated than angry. Apparently he had gone back to the stupid views he had held when she first had known him. Those six months in Spain seemed to have undone all her work to make him see, as her world saw, the game of man and woman.

When she answered, her voice was unmistakably sharp. "No. I thought we had settled that once and for all. Aren't you satisfied to let things stand as they are? Could we be any more to each other if we were married a dozen times over?"

"But your husband——"

"Please leave Edward out of this," Sylvia interrupted. Until now she had temporized. Now she would force the issue. She had not dared before, but now she felt that she could risk it. "Edward and I understand each other perfectly. I go my way. He goes his. I know, I imagine, all there is to be found out about his life. God knows he takes no pains to make a secret of it. Unless he's blind, mine isn't entirely a closed book to him. But as long as he's willing for me to live my life as I want to, I'm satisfied. I have no great desire to go through a divorce scandal with all the details of my private life blazoned in the papers for my friends to enjoy. Besides, even today there are some disadvantages in being a divorcée. Going to Court, for example. But why begin all this discussion again at this late hour? In the beginning, when your morals and scruples were both much more painfully evident than they are now, you accepted the arrangement. Why not now?"

"Because I know that I love you too much to want you to be another man's wife."

Sylvia's laugh rang out light-heartedly. The one thing Bobby could not stand was to be laughed at. Long since, she had discovered that. Ridicule was the one weapon that invariably told against him. "Oh, you precious infant! It's because I am that you love me. Bobby, Bobby! I know you so much better than you know yourself." Without giving him an opportunity to answer, she jumped from her chair. "Come," she said. "I'm going to give you a whisky and soda. This sudden attack of morality must be dealt with." She walked quickly across the deck, and because he did not know what else to do, Bobby followed her.

This flare-up of Sylvia's puzzled him. It showed him a side of her he had never seen before. Most of all, he wished she had not laughed. It was all so deadly serious.

Inside they found Vera alone.

"Vera, darling, Bobby has been too delicious. He has suddenly developed genuine middle-class respectability. Why, he even wants to make an honest woman of me! Don't you, Bobby?" she teased. "Do give him something to drink before his condition gets worse. There's no telling what his next wild idea may be."

Vera turned to speak to the steward whom she had rung for. "Martinis, please. Mr. Austin will mix them, so just bring the things and we will make them here."

"Why not in my cabin?" Sylvia suggested. "If we stay here, the others will certainly join us, and I really don't think I can stand Mrs. Brinton right now."

"All right. You and Bobby run along and I'll have the things sent in there."

Inside her cabin, Sylvia turned quickly to Bob and caught his face between her hands. "Kiss me and tell me you're not angry with me for being so frivolous. I can't be serious today. Some other time."

Bob stooped and kissed her, but the first fleck of gilt was gone from the halo.

SYLVIA sensed this, and set about repairing it. While she did not go to the length of making her divorce a topic for discussion, she did a thing that held Bob just as securely. In a dozen ways, never by actual words, she let him feel that she was considering its possibility—that at any time she might alter her decision. And it was in this state that his uncertain future appeared when the rattle of the anchor chain awakened him in the early morning, and he realized that the yacht was at Monte Carlo and the voyage at an end.

In a way he was sorry; for Sylvia's uninterrupted companionship, which had been his during the voyage, and which he knew he could not expect in the hectic gaiety of the Riviera, had done much to make up for other things not so agreeable. The nightly bridge games, despite the fact that they had proven more than profitable, had not been pleasant. Freddy Carstairs, as he had anticipated, was not a good loser. And Mrs. Brinton! Before he had been twelve hours aboard he had discovered that this cruise was for her anything but what she had expected. Sylvia and Vera to the contrary, she had embarked thinking herself Vera's guest in reality. That it was Charles Hamilton who was responsible for the invitation, she had no more guessed than she had Vera Hamilton's reason for accepting her husband's suggestion so readily.

As soon, almost, as he was aboard, Bobby had been let into the secret, which only Sylvia shared. Captain Cavendish was accidentally to be at Monte Carlo when the yacht arrived, and so Vera had been more than glad when Mrs. Brinton had been suggested.

Dressed, he went out on deck, and was surprised when he saw that the woman he had been thinking of was there ahead of him—early as it was, according to the hours they had observed aboard. Ordinarily nobody appeared before lunch.

Bettina Brinton was leaning on the rail, looking toward the shore. "Very beautiful, don't you think?" she commented as he joined her.

His eyes followed hers. High above them, broken by the vivid color of red and yellow flower beds, the green terraces rose one above another, topped by the ornate white Casino which stood out boldly against the dark mountains and the hillside town behind it.

"This is my first sight of Monte Carlo. I've been very little abroad and wouldn't be here now except the doctors insisted. This promises to be a very enlightening trip. I'm seeing a lot that I never have before."

There was something in her voice and the quick upward glance that she gave him that made Bob realize that Mrs. Brinton knew now why she had been invited to join the party, and he guessed that she was preparing to play a different rôle from the one expected of her. He was glad of it. He liked Mrs. Brinton.

"Good morning, both of you," came from behind them, and they both turned around.

Freddy Carstairs, resplendent, stood in the doorway. He wore a white flannel suit, white silk shirt and spotless white buckskin shoes. Tie and socks were bright blue. An inch of handkerchief of the same shade showed above his coat pocket. He was bareheaded and his waving yellow hair glittered in the sunlight. A big pink carnation in his buttonhole completed the costume.

"Good God! What will the other bridesmaids wear?" Bobby exclaimed, and Bettina Brinton doubled up with helpless laughter.

"What's the joke?" Freddy demanded as he joined them and rested his white-flanneled arms on the rail beside Mrs. Brinton.

Still laughing, she shook her head.

They lunched on the yacht and went ashore in the early afternoon. An automobile, waiting for them on the Condamine, whirled them quickly past the mean houses and shops which line the steep street that leads up from the landing pier, and turned into the square.

The automobile stopped, and its door was thrown open with a flourish by the giant negro commissionnaire of the Hôtel de Paris.

The party dined together at Ciro's that night and theirs was a very gay table. Freddy had spent the afternoon at the Sporting Club, and his good humor left no doubt as to his fortune at the tables.

Charles was as nearly jovial as it was possible for him to be. Mrs. Brinton was full of the excitement of a first visit to the world's gilded playground. For the first time since he had joined the yacht at San Sebastian, Bob could detect no underlying boredom beneath Vera's vivacity. He had not far to seek to find a reason for this.

"What have you been doing all afternoon?" he inquired of her.

"I went for a stroll up the hill."

"Alone?"

Her deprecating smile answered the question. So Roddy Cavendish had already arrived! This did not surprise him. Under Sylvia's tutelage Vera had acquired quite a knack for arranging her affairs.

A COUPLE entering the door caught Bobby's eye. The man, he put down as an Italian. The woman was not so easily placed. A big black hat shaded an oval face, which, were it not for a suspicion of weariness in the wide, black-fringed blue eyes, one would describe as piquant. The studied plainness of her black dress accentuated the long fine lines of her body and the transparent whiteness of her bare arms and shoulders. A glint of gold hair showed beneath the black hat. Her seeming unconsciousness of the little stir her arrival had caused was extremely well carried off. Speaking to no one, chin up, she followed the maître d'hôtel, who, all smiling servility, himself showed them to their table—as if, except for them, the room were empty.

"Who is she, I wonder?" Bobby inquired of Vera.

"Sylvia!" Vera called across the table. "Our Bobby doesn't know the most notorious woman in Europe."

Sylvia looked across at him. "You do argue yourself unknown, Mr. Austin of Madrid. That is the beautiful Mrs. Lawrence."

Bobby's eyes brightened with renewed interest. So that was Kathleen Lawrence! One of the last spectacular members of a fast dying profession.

"Like the rest of the men—smitten at first sight," Vera teased. "But I warn you beforehand. According to gossip, she's tremendously occupied with her Italian just at present."

"I'm quite satisfied to admire from a distance, but you'll have to admit she is wonderfully decorative."

"Not a patch on Sylvia," Vera retorted loyally.

"They're such different types, you can't compare them. But for that matter, I've never seen any one who could compare with Sylvia." There was a suspicion of afterthought in his last sentence.

"I suppose you'll dash off to the tables the second we finish dinner?" Vera inquired, changing the subject.

"I'm in no hurry. Why?"

"All the others will want to, but I'd like to stay and dance awhile before going to that stuffy Sporting Club."

"Then we will stay and let them go on."

There was no objection to this when they communicated their plan, and the others, dinner finished, left them over their coffee.

The insistent beat of a fox-trot lured them to the floor. Vera danced unusually well, and when the orchestra stopped, Bobby joined in the applause for an encore. The music began again and he noticed Mrs. Lawrence among the dancers.

The dance ended, Bobby saw Roddy Cavendish standing in the doorway. He had expected this, and beckoned him to join Vera and himself at their table.

"Fine to see you again, old man. When did you arrive?" he said, crossing the floor to meet him. "Come speak to Vera and have a liqueur with us." The two men had met continually in London, but always had kept up a play of ignorance of each other's affairs. Together they returned to the table, where Roddy greeted Vera as if it were their first, and entirely unexpected meeting.

Making some trivial excuse, Bobby left them. He was going to give them a half hour alone together. As he crossed to the door Kathleen Lawrence and the Italian rose from their table, and as he stood aside to let them pass him in the doorway she turned and spoke to her companion. Her voice, soft and beautifully pitched, matched her face and the tired eyes, he decided. He strolled about for half an hour and then returned to the dining-room.

Captain Cavendish, too tired from his trip to be interested in gambling that night, left Vera and Bobby at the door of the Paris and went on to the Hermitage, where he was staying. They went through the underground passage and separated at the door of the Sporting Club, Vera to play roulette and Bobby to search for Sylvia.

A glance at the roulette tables and then into the baccarat room showed him that Sylvia was not in either place. Abandoning his search finally, he went to the bar, seated himself on one of the high stools and ordered a brandy and soda. He took a cold boiled egg from a dish of them which is always on the bar, and was in the act of peeling it when he saw Freddy Carstairs and Mrs. Lawrence at a table in one corner of the room. In response to his covert signal, Carstairs asked him to join them. Bobby accepted with alacrity, choosing to ignore the none too cordial tone of the invitation.

"Mrs. Lawrence, may I present Mr. Austin?" Freddy murmured perfunctorily.

"How do you do?" Kathleen Lawrence looked up at him, her eyes very blue in the shadow of the wide hat brim. "You're not Bobby Austin, of course," she said.

"Unfortunately, that's the name I have to struggle along with."

"BUT you don't look nearly wicked enough," Kathleen protested, laughing. "You're not in the picture at all. You should be white and very bored. And here you appear sunburned and with not a line in your face—just a nice, healthy young man. Oh, no—it can't be!" She shook her head in pretended disbelief.

"But give me a chance! I'm just through with a lazy cruise aboard a yacht, and for months before that, I vegetated in Madrid. Allow me two or three weeks of Monte Carlo life and I promise to do my best to change my appearance to meet your requirements."

"Don't do that. I think you're much nicer as you are. I'm thoroughly tired of these hectic-eyed, dissipated young men one sees everywhere nowadays."

"Then it shall be as you order, but before I rush off to my bed and beauty sleep, I'm going to have another drink. What shall I bring you?"

"Nothing, thanks."

"Nothing?" Bobby repeated.

"Unfortunately, I can't. I'll tell you a secret." Leaning toward him with a little air of intimacy which he found very pleasing, she whispered: "I'm getting fat. Isn't it horrible?"

Bobby looked at her slender straight body and laughed.

"Oh, but I am! There are two infallible sources of information. My scales told me first, and I was so horrified that I rushed to Christine, my maid, for comfort. All I got was a very precise 'Madame, we all stouten up as we grow older.' I can't tell you how depressed I was. Brutal, I call it." They were both laughing now.

Bobby went over to the bar to order drinks for himself and Carstairs, and she turned her attention to the latter. When he returned, they were deep in gossip of mutual friends. Evidently, they were old acquaintances.

While he sat idly watching her and sipping his drink, Lady Sylvia came in. She was followed by a very dapper, olive-skinned man whom Bobby had never seen before. With the faintest raising of her brows, intended for his eyes alone, she seated herself at a vacant table, apparently unconscious of the three sitting in the corner.

"Who is the man with Lady Sylvia Hutton?" Freddy Carstairs asked Mrs. Lawrence.

"Ali Bey. You know who he is, of course. He's quite the celebrity of the year here, and all the women have been making no end of fuss over him. He's leaving pretty soon, I hear, for England, but whether he is going there to present the Government with a tranquil Egypt or to scream 'Egypt for the Egyptians!' I can't pretend to say. My brain seems rather a blank when it comes to politics," she added with feigned ignorance. "Maybe you will tell us, Mr. Austin. As a diplomat, of course, you have European affairs at your finger-tips. But no, why make you talk shop? I'll have pity on you and let Freddy take me out now for a breath of air. It's poisonous in here." She rose to go and held out her hand. "Good night, and don't forget the beauty sleep."

Alone, Bobby sat at the table, expecting Sylvia to call to him to come over and join her. But apparently she had forgotten his existence. Not until she left the room did he give up hope. When she did so, her failure even to glance in his direction, awakened his quick jealousy.

Sylvia, on her part, was no less curious as to whether Bobby had been with Mrs. Lawrence since dinner. True, she had strolled about outside longer than she had intended. But Bobby should have been waiting for her when she returned. Instead, she had discovered him with Kathleen Lawrence, apparently enjoying himself very much. Men, it seemed, were all alike, where she was concerned. None of them seemed able to resist her.

While this was passing through her mind, Bobby came out of the bar, and seeing her alone—she had said good night to Ali Bey—came across to her.

"Ready to go?" he inquired.

Sylvia nodded. "Let's go the outside way," she suggested.

FOR a few minutes they walked in silence, Sylvia's anger mounting rapidly. Why didn't he ask her where she had been? Apparently, he had not even noticed her absence.

"I must say," she began in a tone she had never used before, "I hardly expected to have to ask for an explanation or rather suggest an apology before we had been twenty-four hours ashore."

"For what, please?"

"That doesn't sound particularly convincing, after you ignore me and all the rest of the party all evening, preferring to make yourself conspicuous with Mrs. Lawrence. Don't misunderstand me. I've no quarrel about your ignoring me. The other, though, is different. One would think that as Vera's guest, and one of her party, you'd hesitate to affiché yourself with that woman the minute her lover's back is turned. Poaching, I call it." Sylvia had allowed herself to get into a rage, and was taking no pains to hide it.

"Ignoring you all evening—I like that! I looked everywhere for you and couldn't find you. Where were you? With that damn, greasy little Egyptian, I suppose." Bobby's temper was equal to hers.

"That 'damn, greasy little Egyptian,' as you call him, is a very distinguished man."

"And Mrs. Lawrence is a very beautiful woman."

"Quite true, but she's the most notorious cocotte in Europe—and at present here with that Italian count."

"That I know nothing about, Sylvia. I'll take a leaf from your own philosophy. You claim to care nothing for any one's morals, concerning yourself entirely with their manners. I assure you, Mrs. Lawrence's manners are charming."

As quickly as Sylvia's anger had flared up, it disappeared. Its effect on Bobby had been anything but the desired one. She slipped her hand inside his arm. "Don't let's quarrel our very first evening, Bobbykins. I'm sorry that I was so disagreeable—but I'm dead tired, and I looked everywhere for you and couldn't find you. When I did, and you were with Kathleen Lawrence, I was raging." For obvious reasons, she chose to forget that when she did find him she herself was very much occupied with Ali Bey. "Do forgive me!" An appealing little smile hovered uncertainly about her lips as she looked up at him.

"There's nothing to forgive, sweet," Bobby answered, all contrition at his display of temper. "I'm afraid I was in a rage, too. Let's forget all about it. As for Mrs. Lawrence, she's nothing to me. If you feel this way about her, I won't see her again."

"Forget that, too," Sylvia answered quickly. "I never made a more ridiculous speech in all my life. There's no reason why you shouldn't see her as often as you please. Monte Carlo is the one place where everybody can know everybody."

It was seldom indeed that Sylvia made a mistake where personalities were concerned. This time she did. Like a great many other people as worldly as herself, she had never seen Kathleen Lawrence, the woman, behind the mask of Kathleen Lawrence, cocotte.

WITH the exception of Freddy Carstairs, no one could call the two weeks which followed the arrival of the yachting party at Monte Carlo an unmixed success. But for Freddy they were perfect. Almost at once he discovered and became identified with a set where the plenty of his money and the scarcity of his morals were equally valued assets.

With various emotions the rest of the party witnessed the *savoir-faire* with which Bettina Brinton managed the situation in which she found herself. Charles Hamilton's attentions were accepted to exactly the degree her position as a guest aboard his yacht demanded, and no more. This not only brought to the surface all the bad temper of his wounded vanity, but gave him a great deal more unoccupied time than his wife desired or found convenient, with Roddy Cavendish also at Monte Carlo. What Mrs. Brinton herself thought, one could only surmise. To look at her, no one would imagine that she was conscious that a situation existed.

Sylvia Hutton's difficulties were twofold: Ali Bey on the one hand and Kathleen Lawrence on the other.

Openly, in the face of no little opposition—and really because of its challenge—she annexed the Egyptian. To hold him she was forced to sacrifice a great deal more time than she had anticipated. Ali Bey was a true Oriental in his attitude toward women, and did not understand any apportionment of feminine interest.

Further to complicate the situation, the Italian count left the Riviera and returned to Rome shortly after their arrival, and Bobby fell into the way of spending a great deal more time with Mrs. Lawrence than was desirable.

This was annoying but could not be helped. Sylvia knew better than openly to criticize his friendship with Kathleen Lawrence until she could manage to give him more of her own time. And after all, she had nothing to fear from Mrs. Lawrence as a rival, she told herself. Nevertheless, the turn a conversation took with Bobby was very agreeably reassuring.

They were at Ciro's, where always on the occasional evenings she gave him they dined.

"I'm really going to insist on your playing when we get to the rooms, tonight, Bobby," Sylvia announced in the middle of dinner. "For one reason, it will give you something to do besides sitting in the bar consuming large quantities of brandy."

"I guess you're right about that. A week ago Kathleen told me the same thing, and suggested that I hold up a bit."

"You surprise me. I didn't imagine that lady concerned herself greatly with reformation. And so it's Kathleen now, is it? You *have* got on! I suppose the next thing we know, you'll be supplanting the Italian. Or am I prophesying something that has already happened?"

"Oh, do let up, Sylvia! You know perfectly well that it is simply because neither of us plays that we sit about together and gossip. Why, do you mind?"

"Mind! On the contrary, I'm delighted. You're not flattering yourself that I'm jealous, are you? Please do me the honor of believing that I haven't yet placed myself in the running with the Mrs. Lawrences of the world."

Bobby was at a loss how to reply. This Sylvia, always ready to find unintended meanings in the most casual and harmless remarks, was a very different woman from the one he had known in London. Was Ali Bey the answer? He was honest enough to admit that his suave, olive-skinned rival was a personage. Ali Bey missed no opportunity to be seen with the beautiful Englishwoman, and Sylvia was pleased to flaunt her conquest.

His surmise seemed corroborated when Sylvia informed him casually that she was going to Cannes the following night for a dinner which the Egyptian was giving for her there.

All Bobby's resentment of the past two weeks was in his tone when he replied: "I wish to God I had stayed in Madrid and had never come on this trip."

"Why? I thought you were being tremendously amused. What is it?"

"Everything. You know without my telling you. On the yacht it was different. There you were as you've always been. But here you've changed—I don't seem to understand you. This Egyptian—do you like him very much?" He asked the question as if he feared to hear the answer.

SYLVIA'S eyes brightened. The hard lines about her mouth disappeared. Bobby jealous and come to heel, she knew how to deal with, and because she wanted to believe it she had no difficulty in persuading herself that her nagging suspicion of his growing indifference was imaginary.

"Of course, I like him tremendously. He has been very nice to me—much nicer than you have lately." She was sure of her ground now, and knew just how far she could go.

"I've been as nice as you would let me. But that's not what I mean. Has it—does it make any difference between you and me?" He had suddenly become as diffident as a boy.

"Suppose I should say that it has? You wouldn't care, would you—now that you've met Mrs. Lawrence?" A minute before she would not have dared. Now she was certain.

"Damn Mrs. Lawrence!" Bobby exploded. "What has she to do with anything between you and me? You haven't answered my question."

He was so intent on her reply that he

saw none of the triumph in her flashing smile. Sylvia was more than satisfied. Bobby was still hers, and in a few days the Egyptian would leave for Paris. Then she could set about accomplishing the thing which she had decided upon the minute her eyes rested upon him at San Sebastian. He must come back to London.

TWO days later, while he was at breakfast in his room, a telegram was brought to him from the Ambassador in Madrid:

> With my very keen regrets for its contents, I am wiring you that a message has just been received from Washington, transferring you to Paraguay, to act as chargé during the Minister's absence. He wishes to leave Asuncion as soon as you can arrange to proceed there.

Asuncion! Two years, no doubt, buried in Paraguay. It was tough luck.

"Just received this," he scribbled across the bottom of the sheet, and putting it into an envelope, sent it around to Sylvia.

A few minutes later the servant brought the envelope back to him. "Come and talk to me as soon as you are dressed," she had written across it.

From the miserable attempt at a smile which he made when he entered her sitting-room, Sylvia could tell how hard Bobby was hit by the Ambassador's message. She could read more—that refusing to go, which would be, of course, to resign, had not occurred to him.

She had no doubt about the outcome, but she realized that here was a time when she must make no slightest error. The isolation of Paraguay was as that of the Antarctic as she painted it. "Buried alive . . . People forget one very quickly. . . ." Then she brought up again the idea of a post in London, adding as a finale how sad it was that Bobby had not fallen in love with a girl of simple tastes instead of with a woman whose petty luxuries his salary as a diplomat would not pay for. He sat silent for a long time. Then:

"If I come back to London, do you really think I could get a foothold in the City?"

Sylvia knew she had won. "Of course! I haven't the slightest doubt that not only could you get a foothold, but you could secure something very well worth your while from the very first. Oh, Bobby, if you only would! The future would be so much clearer. Anything might happen." That was all, but she put into the words an unmistakable meaning. A dazzling future with Sylvia as his wife seemed very near, and Bobby, as she knew he would, made his decision.

The telegram which definitely ended his diplomatic career sent, Bobby walked over to Ciro's, where he and Kathleen Lawrence had fallen into the habit of meeting before luncheon. A glance about among the outdoor tables told him that she had not arrived. Mrs. Brinton, sitting with Freddy Carstairs, beckoned to him. As he made his way among the tables he felt a little surprised at their being together. Freddy, now, was almost never with any of their party.

"Sit down, and have a cocktail," she said, when he joined them.

"Thanks, I'm waiting for Mrs. Lawrence. I see her coming now, so I'll have to leave you."

"Why not ask her to join us here?"

"You don't object to meeting her?"

"Why should I? In view of the construction which seems to have been put on my acceptance of Mrs. Hamilton's invitation—I don't see how it could possibly make any difference." She accented the "Mrs."

"That will be fine. I'll go and get her."

"Good morning," he said as he met Kathleen. "Come on over to the table where Freddy Carstairs and Mrs. Brinton are sitting. She wants to meet you."

After introducing the two women, Bobby turned to Mrs. Brinton. "If you and Carstairs are lunching together, why not make it a party of four and all of you lunch with me? We can have it right here on this table—it's an ideal day to lunch outdoors. I'm trusting that you haven't another engagement," he added, turning to Kathleen.

"Of course I should say that I'm terribly sorry but that I have—and intimate by an indulgent smile that I forgive you for suggesting that I am ever without a luncheon engagement. Then, after saving my face, go to my room at the Paris and have a tray sent up. But I have no intention of doing anything of the kind. I'm going to be quite honest and admit that there's no one clamoring for my society."

They all laughed and the luncheon party was arranged.

"Why so quiet?" Kathleen demanded. The meal was nearly finished, and Bobby had been very silent through it all.

"Thinking. I got a telegram this morning ordering me to go to South America at once—Paraguay."

"Oh, I am sorry! Paraguay of all places! What bad luck! I hope you can manage not to go right away."

"I'm not going. I've resigned instead."

"Already? Haven't you been rather in a hurry about it?"

"I honestly don't know whether I have or not."

Mrs. Lawrence's face was grave. "What will you do? Have you anything in view?"

"Nothing definite. I'll go back to London and look around for something."

"Of course I know nothing of conditions, but I would imagine that things are pretty much at a standstill in the business world right now. And besides—you *will* understand how I mean what I am going to say, won't you? You've spent all of your life in diplomacy. What business is there that you know anything about?"

"None—that's the devil of it," Bobby frankly admitted.

"Isn't there something you could do to cancel the telegram you've sent and give yourself a little more time to think it over? It's such a radical step to take without thinking of it from all angles."

"Yes, that's true. I might wire—but then, I've talked it all over with Sylvia, and between us we decided——"

"No doubt you're doing the right thing. My suggestion was made on the spur of the moment, and probably is as silly as most of my ideas seem to be." Then, wise woman, she changed the subject.

AFTER luncheon the four parted, and Bobby strolled up the hill to look again at a bit of old silver he had seen in a shop there.

"Bob Austin! Of all people! Where under the sun did you come from?"

Bobby turned to a motor from which the surprised exclamation had issued, and found himself looking into Elizabeth Stuart's laughing brown eyes.

"After you upset all arrangements for a perfectly good week-end party at Cobworth, by chucking at the last minute, and then skipping out of England without even coming to see us to say good-by—I should cut you dead. Instead, here I am greeting you like a long lost brother." Without waiting for him to inform her where under the sun he had come from or to inform her of anything else, Elizabeth continued, "Hop in and we'll go for a little spin while you tell me all the news." She moved over to a corner, making a place for him on the seat beside her.

"And what are you doing here?" he inquired when at last she gave him an opportunity to speak.

"You should know that I'm playing in the tennis tournament at Cannes. I can say that now; but after today, I'm inclined to believe that I'll have to use the past tense. Tomorrow I play Miss Royce. Rather, I'll appear on the court, armed with a racket. Not that I expect to hit anything with it. It's just to let the gallery know that I'm supposed to furnish the opposition. Come over and see me annihilated. But tell me about yourself. Here on leave, I suppose?"

"I was."

"What do you mean?"

"That I've resigned. The Department ordered me to South America. I couldn't see myself buried there for God knows how long, so I got out."

"What are you going to do?"

"I think I'll honor London with my presence."

"Of course, that's taken for granted—but after you get there?"

"Why is it taken for granted that I'll go back to London?" he inquired.

She looked up at him, and the quizzical smile which he had always found so attractive began in the tiny sun-wrinkles in the corners of her eyes, crinkled her short upturned nose and ended on her parted lips which disclosed her white even teeth. "This is the first time you've ever intimated to me that you considered me lacking in ordinary intelligence. But never mind the reason. It's nice to know you're going to be back in England—I suppose you will hunt in the autumn—which reminds me! How is your golf? Are you playing much here? I hear the course is rotten. Is it?"

"I don't know," Bobby replied. "I haven't played."

"Then what do you do for exercise? Tennis?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to admit that the two-hundred-yard walk from the hotel to Ciro's is about my speed in exercise these days."

"You look it," Elizabeth announced, surveying him critically. "Some one should take you in hand and see that you get yourself back into condition. I suppose you'd faint if I suggested some tennis this afternoon."

"I don't know anything I'd rather do," Bobby replied, responding to a sudden impulse. "I see you're dressed for it. Tell your chauffeur to turn back and go to the Paris and I'll be ready in five minutes. I'd love some exercise."

"See how badly you can beat me," Elizabeth called across the nets to him as they took their places. "I want to get used to it—it will help tomorrow's *débâcle*."

The first set Bobby won easily. "After that serve of yours, anything Miss Royce gives me will seem like pat-ball," Elizabeth commented as they sat together for a breathing spell before beginning again.

The second set was harder for him, and he was much the more flushed and disheveled of the two when he finally won it.

He lost the first game of the third set and then the second. It was the first time he had lost his service during the afternoon. When the third straight game went to her, Elizabeth called across to him: "What's the matter? You're not trying. Get that!" And she shot a forehand drive to the corner of his base line. He did; and after a long struggle won the set.

"That's better," Elizabeth panted; "but I made you work for it." The games had gone to 10-8.

"That's enough for me," she said, walking off the court. "Thanks for the workout that you've given me. It ought to be a big help tomorrow."

"It's been great fun," Bobby answered. "But, Lord, I am in rotten condition! Just three sets and I'm beaten. It's ridiculous."

On their way to the hotel, Bobby announced that he would come to Cannes the next day to see her play.

Back at the Paris, Bobby splashed about in his bath, whistling. For the first time since he had left Madrid, he felt thoroughly exercised and ravenously hungry. He stretched out his long body in the tub, lazily enjoying the soothing effect of the warm water on his tired muscles. As he dressed he thought of Elizabeth. Wholesome—that was the word, he concluded. Inevitably he compared her and her life—full of hunting, tennis and outdoors—with Sylvia, and the world of which he had become a part. In his present mood—his body a-tingle and glowing from the exercise, her world, built around sex and excitement, did not appear as attractive as when considered through the golden haze of a glass of champagne.

A frown of annoyed disappointment passed across his face.

THE days slipped by almost imperceptibly—as days have a habit of doing on the Riviera, their very sameness speeding them.

Some ten days after Ali Bey's departure for Paris Vera was surprised to see Sylvia walk into her room at an hour when she usually was only beginning to wake up.

She had just received a letter from Ali Bey, saying that he was leaving for London at once.

"What are you going to do?"

"Receive a telegram from Edward making it imperative for me to go back to London at once. I've already wired him what to say."

"Have you told Bobby?"

"Not yet. But I'm going to make him stay on, and I want you to bring him back with you on the yacht."

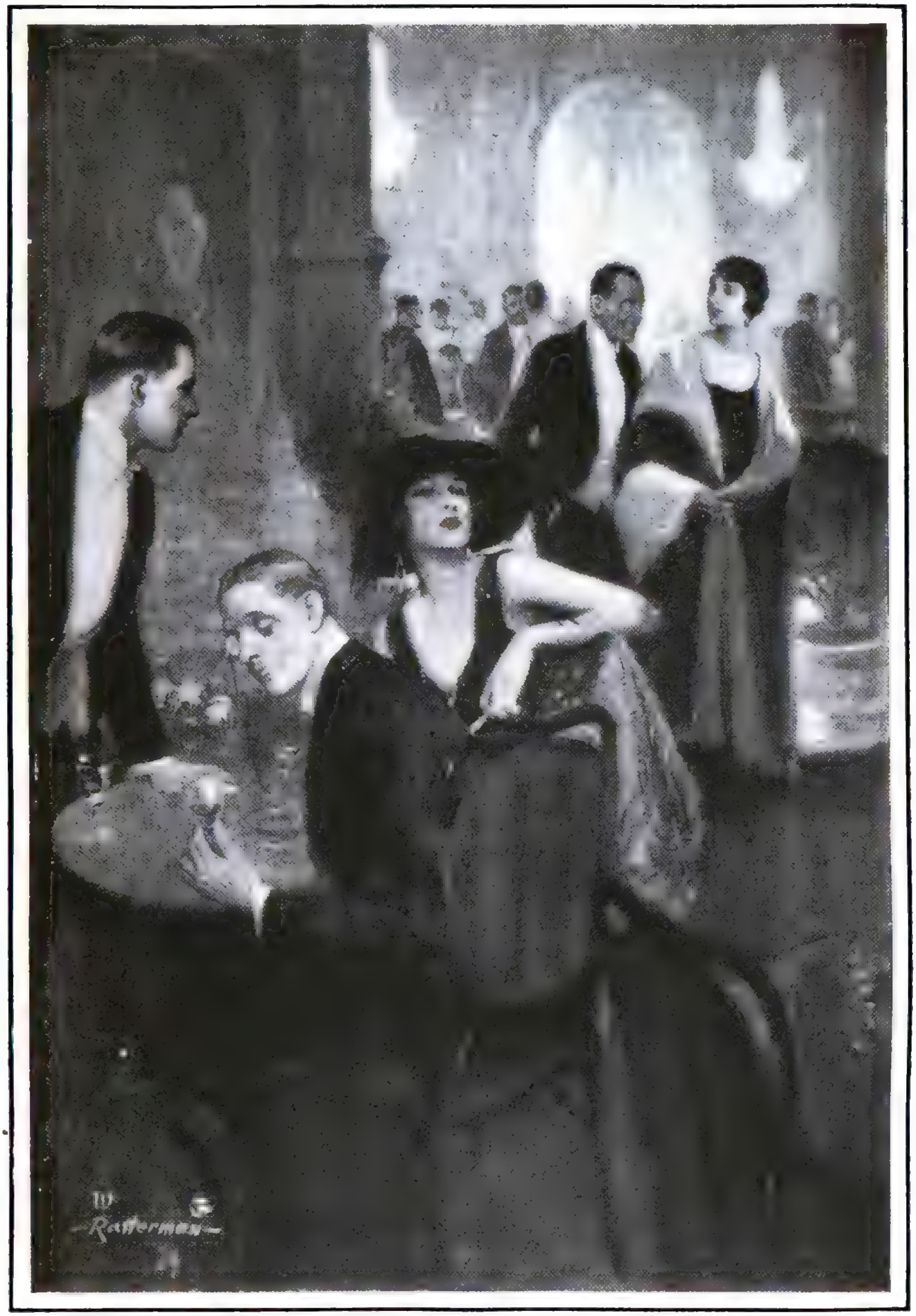
"That's easier said than done. I'll do my best, but with you away, you can't expect me to compete with Mrs. Lawrence."

Sylvia looked up quickly. "That's quite past, I'm sure. Don't you think so?"

"I believe you're actually in love with Bobby, Sylvia. I've never seen you exert yourself half so much for such a long time for any other man that interested you—and I've seen a good many."

"Yes—I suppose I am." Sylvia's admission was made as much to herself as to Vera. It was not only Bobby, but what he stood for in her life, that she loved. That she had a big position, that around her was the glamour of London's reigning beauty, had no bearing on his love for her. He loved her only because she was a woman and beautiful. And she felt that he was the last.

To Bobby she would always remain beautiful. She was simply the woman he loved, and she intended to hold him while she could. But some day there would come



Lady Sylvia was followed by a dapper, olive-skinned man whom Bobby had never seen before. There was the faintest raising of her brows, intended for his eyes alone.

another woman, as beautiful, and younger. Then the inevitable—youth to youth.

"God! How I hate youth!" she exclaimed aloud. "The more I have to pretend it, the more I hate those who have it." She leaned back in the chair, where she had thrown herself, and lighted a cigarette.

"I suppose it is when we get this particular sort of blue devils—panicky at a gray hair or a new wrinkle—that the sort of women we laugh at, have it on us. At least they are sure of their stodgy husbands and their babies."

"What in God's name put you in this mood, Sylvia? To hear you talk one would think you'd arrived at the stage of false teeth and wigs."

"I'm sure I don't know. Got up too early, I suppose. Have you any idea just how old I am, Vera?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Not the slightest."

"And you never will." Luckily Lady Sylvia had been born in India and had spent her young girlhood there. Consequently there were none of those annoying comparisons "Now So-and-so was born in such-and-such a year and Sylvia must have been at least—" After her name in the Peerage there were no telltale figures to belie the age she claimed. She had seen to that with rare foresight. "That's a secret between me and God and I'd argue the point if He told it."

Both women laughed—and with the laugh came a change in Sylvia's mood.

"Anyway, I leave Bobby to you. As far as Kathleen Lawrence is concerned, I've had that out with him. All I have to do is to snap my fingers and he'll come to me. I'm much more exercised about keeping him away from me at present. Just now he would be decidedly in the way in London, so I leave him here in your care."

"Possibly you're right—but if I were you, I'd see that he left Monte Carlo—and at once." After all Vera was not entirely a fool.

JUDGING others by her own standards, Sylvia believed that she had bested Kathleen Lawrence in a clash for Bobby's affections. Her first mistake was in assuming that Kathleen was a rival. In reality Mrs. Lawrence had accepted Bobby as an amusing acquaintance and nothing more, and had concerned herself about him not at all.

Sylvia had mistaken a noncombatant for a defeated enemy.

The other error was in the quality of her hold over Bobby. Neither he nor she realized how utterly physical it was.

"When do you leave?" he asked, after a difficult quarter of an hour of expostulation and soothing.

"I suppose it will have to be tonight," Sylvia answered resignedly.

Bobby's undisguised disappointment was flattering. "Can't you wait even until tomorrow?"

Sylvia shook her head. "No, as long as it has to be done, the sooner the better. Tonight it will have to be, I'm afraid."

She rose from her chair and came to the sofa on which Bobby was sitting. Slipping her arm around his neck, she pulled his head down on her shoulder. "It's just for a very few weeks, darling boy, and after that you'll be back in London to stay. No more of this eternal uncertainty—wondering how much longer we will be together with every day the possibility of transfer orders hanging over us." She turned her head and kissed his forehead. "I wonder if you realize how much you mean to me—how much I love you?"

He drew her close to him, whispering in her ear all the half incoherent protestations which lovers have whispered since time began.

"I'm frightened sometimes, darling," she murmured, looking up into his eyes. "Suppose one of us ceased to care and the other kept on caring. Horrible—and nobody's fault. If it ends, it ends, and neither of us could ever smirch anything which has been so beautiful with pretense."

"I'll not let you even talk about either of us not caring—it couldn't be—it's for always," Bobby protested, kissing her again, and he believed his own words implicitly. In spite of three years in Lady Sylvia's school where constancy was a catchword and fidelity a jest, love had not yet become for him a synonym for passion. But that passion added to fascination produced a very deceptive counterfeit, he realized not at all.

BACK in London, Lady Sylvia proceeded at once to put her plans into operation.

She had seen Ali Bey in Paris, when she passed through, and he had shown himself delighted at meeting her so soon again, and was even more pleased when he learned that she would be in London when he arrived there.

Her house in Grosvenor Street, which she had closed when she left for Monte Carlo, sending her husband to his club, was opened at once—and it was at a dinner there that London society first saw the much-talked-of Ali Bey.

The guests at this dinner were carefully chosen. It was composed of the women who would have liked to introduce Ali Bey to London, and their accompanying males.

The dinner proceeded as successfully as her carefully laid plans had insured. But successful as the dinner was, she realized long before she rose to go with the other women to the drawing-room, that she had made no mistake in insisting that Bobby remain on the Riviera. The Egyptian at Monte Carlo, where he had nothing to do but amuse himself, and the Egyptian in London with a definite object to achieve, were two very distinct persons. And it did not take her long to appreciate that, with oriental astuteness, he was going to use every available weapon, social as well as political, to gain his ends. To hold him, she must be not only the most brilliant, but also the most useful woman in London. This would be difficult, and to achieve it she must give him her undivided time. Therefore, for the present anyway, Bobby must be kept away from London.

Even a letter from Vera, flying danger signals from the Riviera, failed to influence her determination. Nevertheless she read the letter again—at least the part of it concerning Bobby.

"I haven't laid eyes on him for two days, and for days before that, never except with Mrs. Lawrence. As a matter of fact, we had rather a row. Entirely his fault, as you'll agree when I tell you about it.

"Charles had gone to Cannes for something or other and so Roddy and I were to dine together. I happened to run into Bobby and as I'd seen practically nothing of him, thought it better to ask him to join us. He said he'd like to, but that Mrs. Lawrence was dining with him. I said that should make no difference, or something of the kind—meaning, of course, that he chuck her for us. He misunderstood, intentionally I'm sure, and said: 'That's awfully decent of you, Vera. I'll ask Kathleen and let you know.'

"My dear, I was furious—and took no pains to hide it; said the first thing which came into my head—which happened to be that I hadn't yet extended my charity to feeding kept women deserted by their lovers. Vulgar, but to the point.

"I've never seen him so hideously angry. He glared—all the time looking straight at my new diamond and sapphire bracelet. Roddy says he doesn't know who gave it to me, but of course he does. Anyway, in that particularly nasty tone he uses at times, he told me that as far as he could see, there was no difference between kept women and a lot of others very generally accepted, except in the manner they received payment. Then he turned on his heel and left me."

Vera went on to diagnose his attitude, ending with: "I think you'd be wise to telegraph for him. She's terribly good-looking, you know—and so young."

SYLVIA smiled over the last two words. Yes—Vera was a bit of a cat, too. The only result of this letter, however, was that Sylvia tore up one which she had written to Bobby and rewrote:

February 10th.

BOBBYKINS, DEAR:

You'd appreciate this letter a great deal more if you realized how very wretched I feel. London is too ghastly right now. Fog, rain, rain, fog. To add to this, I've been in my room for three days—just missed flu, the doctor says—and I will be here for several days more, I'm afraid.

As it turned out, this proved to be very stupid. Ordinarily she was much more careful, but she was so intent upon satisfactorily explaining the necessity for his remaining away that she put in this bid for sympathy almost without giving it a thought. She then gave a detailed account of her husband's difficult behavior, which made it urgent that Bobby keep out of London a while longer, adding in conclusion:

Already I have begun to agitate for something in the City for you, and have several irons in the fire. Am sure that there will be no difficulty, which pleases me very much as you seemed rather doubtful when I assured you that it could be easily arranged.

There was no mention of either Ali Bey or Kathleen Lawrence.

Why she had refrained from telling him

that already she had forced Sir Edward Dorne to promise to place him in the foreign department of his banking house, she did not stop to analyze. Possibly it was because she preferred that Bobby should not even wonder what weapon she possessed against that very businesslike and purposeful gentleman, strong enough to force him to do this at a time when business was at a standstill, and old employees almost daily were being dismissed. Intimate knowledge of certain happenings in her part of Mayfair had been useful more than once to Lady Sylvia.

THREE days later, Bobby read her letter while he breakfasted. That finished, he turned to his London papers. A headline in the theatrical news caught his eye. "'Outlaws' Well Received at the Royalty." His glance traveled down the column. The author was one of his friends and it was his first play. At the end of the very flattering review was the usual list of prominent "first nighters." He scanned the names without interest. Then a short paragraph fixed his attention:

> Lady Sylvia Hutton, just returned from the Riviera, was in one of the boxes. Among her party were . . . and Ali Bey, the brilliant young Egyptian statesman, who recently arrived in London—to conclude, according to rumor, important negotiations with the Government.

He glanced at the date at the top of the sheet. "February 10th." Frowning, he reopened Lady Sylvia's letter. The date was the same—February 10th.

What did it mean? No reporter could possibly mistake any one for Lady Sylvia Hutton. Her face was better known even than that of the most photographed actress. And why had she failed to mention that the Egyptian was in London?

He ran through a pile of old papers. Finally he found what he sought. Ali Bey had arrived in London two days after she had. And why had she lied about being ill? Or had she? Could the reporter have mistaken some one for her? As much as he would like to believe this, he felt certain it could not be the case. Even if it were, the fact that Ali Bey had been in London, practically ever since her arrival, remained unexplained. Not once had she mentioned his name.

He dressed and went in search of Vera. Their differences had long since been made up and forgotten. When he found her, he went straight to the point.

"Do you think that any one in London could be mistaken for Sylvia?" he demanded abruptly.

"Certainly not. Why ask such a question?"

He showed her the newspaper paragraph. "I got a letter from her this morning, dated the same day. In it she told me that she was ill with flu and had been for days."

Vera's hesitation was only for an instant. "That! Of course it's a mistake. No doubt the man who wrote it spent the evening in the bar of the theater and then made a list of those who he considered should have been in the audience—irrespective of whether they actually were or not. You'd be surprised at the number of times I've read that I was at this or that place when more likely I wasn't even in town."

"Even so—why hasn't Sylvia so much as mentioned that Ali Bey is in London?"

Vera considered a moment before replying: "I'll confess something, Bobby. I've known all the time that he was there. Sylvia wrote me how surprised she was at his arrival. You know, when he left here, he told us that he would be for weeks and weeks in Paris.

"Of course I can't tell you why Sylvia hasn't mentioned it to you—but to me, there seems to be a very simple explanation. You'll admit that you were rather determined to go back to London when Edward telegraphed for her, and no doubt she thinks that if she tells you that your Egyptian *bête noir* is there, wild horses couldn't keep you away. And from all she has written me about the way Edward is behaving it would be little short of a catastrophe if you appeared in London right now." This and a good deal more in the same vein.

Whether she convinced him or not, she was unable to decide, but feeling that she had handled the situation in the best way possible, as soon as Bobby left she sat down and wrote Sylvia in detail all that had transpired.

Half convinced, he went out on the terraces, hoping to meet Kathleen. He found her there and, dropping into step beside her, strolled along in the sunshine. Kathleen, sensing that he did not want to talk, walked silent beside him.

Finally he turned to her, "I want to ask you about something which concerns me very much. Will you answer me absolutely frankly?"

"Yes, or not at all."

Then Bobby recounted the details of the letter, the newspaper account of the theater party and Vera's explanation.

"I believe I prefer not to express any opinion at all, Bobby," Kathleen said as he concluded.

"Why?"

"Frankly, I am too much prejudiced against Lady Sylvia to be able to judge fairly. Thinking of her as I do, I could put but one construction on the whole thing."

"Why do you dislike her so?"

"I wouldn't call it dislike—I've never even met her. 'Distrust' is a much better word. Although I don't know her, I do know dozens of women of exactly her type. If I've ever trusted them—I've regretted it. That goes for most women, though."

That they discussed Lady Sylvia without any reservation, was an apt commentary on how rapidly their friendship had advanced. From the first, Kathleen had assumed that he was a lonely young man, entirely interested in another woman—herself a substitute with whom he wished to while away otherwise boring hours. Bobby had accepted this construction, and would have indignantly denied that Kathleen Lawrence possessed any attraction for him other than that of a charming companion. He had been very lonely after Sylvia's departure. Kathleen had proved to be a delightful friend and he was honestly unaware that their days together had wrought any change in his regard for her.

"IN OTHER words—you believe the newspaper paragraph and that her failure to mention Ali Bey has been intentional?"

"If I have any opinion at all—that's it," Kathleen admitted; "but I really don't know enough to have an opinion. How long have you known her?"

"Three years."

"Then you should certainly be able to judge for yourself. After three years you must know whether she is the sort of woman one can believe or not. And now I must leave you. I'm already late for my luncheon engagement."

"We dine together tonight, don't we?"

"Surely," she called back. "Eight-thirty at Ciro's."

Through a solitary luncheon and a long afternoon, he reviewed in procession the days since he had first met Sylvia, seeing them more clearly than ever before—less colored by the veils in which his infatuation had wrapped them. For the first time he doubted that his love for Sylvia was the *grande passion* of his life. The doubt, once there, grew.

After a glance at his face when she met him at dinner, Kathleen made a shrewd guess as to his mood, and at once set about to alter it. It was more difficult than she had anticipated.

Breaking a long silence, Bobby looked across at her and said, apropos of nothing, "Hellish place, Monte Carlo, don't you think?"

"I'm delighted you find your dinner guest so amusing," Kathleen answered, still trying to steer the conversation to the frivolous.

"No, I'm serious. It's on my nerves terribly—this place. Two weeks here are all right, but after that, it begins to get you. I'm sick of sunshine, flowers and the whole damn artificial show."

"Then why don't you go away? Get a change."

"All the Riviera is very much the same. Monte Carlo is a little worse than the rest, that's all. Don't you ever feel it?"

Kathleen smiled wearily. "Much worse, Bobby," she answered quietly. "I'm part of the Carnival. From here I go back to Paris, then to Deauville and so on—the same old routine, the same people. I loathe it, but I can't get out of it. Much as I hate it, I hate worse being by myself, with nothing to distract me."

Bobby smiled across at her understandingly. He had a very nice smile.

"I have an idea," he said impulsively. "Let's run away from it for a while. We'll go back into the mountains to one of those primitive little villages, way off from everything. What do you say?"

"Sounds nice . . . But I guess I won't," Kathleen decided.

"But why not?" Then he looked into her eyes and flushed red, partly because of what he saw there, but as much at his stupidity. For a moment he had forgotten that Kathleen knew him only as Bobby Austin, the lover of Sylvia Hutton. What conclusion could she draw but that, very bluntly, he was proposing that, for the moment, she take Sylvia's place?

His face grew even redder as he sought words to explain. This in itself was worthy of remark, and Kathleen Lawrence, in whose world a blush was even rarer than in Sylvia Hutton's, noticed it and, marveling, understood.

"Surely, Kathleen," he blundered on awkwardly, "we're good enough pals for me not to have to tell you that I'm not proposing a—a——"

"Yes, we are quite good enough pals, Bobby," she put in, deciding to help him out. "And I am going to change my mind and go—when and where?"

"Tomorrow, and I know just the place. Sospel. If it is anything like all I've heard of it, it will be perfect. Nowhere, really, in actual distance. But quite another world. Suppose we start out just after luncheon."

The test of Austin's love for Sylvia lies close ahead of him. See the next instalment of "One-Way Street," in May EVERYBODY'S, out April 15.

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May *EVERYBODY'S*—out April 15

The Sheik of Alabam

Love Makes the World Go Round, They Say. But Denys and Madeleine Weren't So Sure. Another Delightful Fantasy by the Author of "The Lark Among Crows"

By Michael Arlen

Illustration by O. J. Gatter

"MADELEINE, Madeleine!"

The young man with the fair hair that shone like gold in the prodigal sunlight threw back his head and listened, but all he heard were the million faint sounds that are called silence in a sunlit garden. And far below—for the garden lay like a bright handkerchief on a hill—the afternoon sea slept profoundly.

"Madeleine!" he called. "Madeleine!"

But that was surely a lazy young man, for not one inch did he move from his station on the lawn, a very tidy lawn that was made for nothing if not for the cultivation of afternoon tea and leisurely conversation.

Now from where he stood on the lawn, a lithe figure in white flannels with the sun for a crown on his young head, the long white villa, brave with red-and-white sunblinds, lay before his eyes like a temptation; and so he smiled a funny smile, in a way he had when temptations stood before him. Often had he smiled that smile, and always the temptation that stood before him had become as a fruit in his hand, and he had enjoyed the fruit, and then he had gone on to enjoy other fruits; for this was young Denys, handsome young Denys of the ancient house of Malaise, as penniless a cadet of that ancient house as had ever wandered the world in search of ease and distraction—for such were the laws of his life. And his life had been made easy for him, for he was an attractive young man, as young men go, and none more diverting at all hours of the day and night: so that many had forgotten that for five long years he had been a puissant man of war.

But all that is ancient history, and what has ancient history to do with Denys, he who stood on the lawn before the Villa Corydon and called out the name of Madeleine, that she should come out and play tennis with him? The hard court lay beside the villa like a cloth of pink silk between the white and yellow cascades of myrtle and mimosa; and far below curved the pretty bay of Cannes, as blue as the blue of a doll's eyes, and across the bay loitered the yachts with ivory-white sails. . . .

"Madeleine! Oh, Madeleine! Denys, your lover, is calling you!"

And she came out from the Villa Corydon, a white figure with small golden head and eyes as soft as daydreams, and you saw at once why the villa was like a temptation to any man who was a man.

"Ah, me! Ah, me! Madeleine has no lover, boy! Madeleine is quite forlorn!"

"Well, then," laughed Denys—and he never forced a laugh—"don't talk so much, and let's play tennis."

Now you must know that Madeleine's voice was low and slightly husky, the sort of voice that women so like in other women, a strangely enchanting voice to come from that tall white girl with the short, curly golden hair; and it was a voice that always seemed to whisper, though indeed this Madeleine was so proud that she would never really whisper about anything, wherefore she was often shocking people.

"It's a shame," whispered Madeleine; "it's a shame, Denys, to put you under another humiliation. But what will be, will be; so come, we'll play. I am free till tea time."

"And then?"

"And then, Denys, my services are required. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Well, let's forget poverty!" cried Denys, he who had never remembered it until the bailiffs stood at his door; wherefore Captain Malaise did not often approach his own door but lived at the houses of his many friends, who liked him very well, for he was an attractive young man, as young men go. . . .

And so Denys and Madeleine played tennis on the pink court between the myrtle and mimosa, while far below the afternoon sea slept profoundly; and, because Denys's hair was golden under the sun and because Madeleine's was golden even under the moon, they were very evenly matched in the game.

AS DENYS was poor, so Madeleine was poor; but because Denys was a man he could wear an air of freedom, while Madeleine could only wear the clothes that her women-friends gave her, and women-friends have a way of giving presents which is not conducive to a sense of freedom in the recipient. That is what Mrs. Edith Wharton says, and who will gainsay Mrs. Wharton about the ways of women and parasites?

Of course Madeleine made a little money. Her bridge was very good; and she was the "friend" of Mrs. Lyon, the owner of the Villa Corydon. Mrs. Lyon was an American widow who was so well known in America for being unknown that she lived in Europe; and to her house the Lady Madeleine, daughter of the recently deceased seventh Duke of Marlow (bankrupt) and sister of the eighth (bankrupt), brought her many friends, so that the heart of Angela Lyon was thrilled with the idea that she was in society, and the dreams of Angela Lyon were concerned with the coming season in London, where she would take a large house, and how she would entertain a salon therein, whereas, of course, she would only be keeping a restaurant. But Madeleine made no such petty distinctions; she would not ever laugh at her whose bread she ate; besides, Madeleine loved her, in her fashion.

Such then, with many details of minor significance, is the history of the Lady Madeleine until this afternoon when she is playing tennis with a very old friend on a small hill above the bay of Cannes. That very old friend, to be sure, is one among the many details of minor significance, for there was a night during the war, which they say is over now, when Captain Malaise, on short leave, approached Madeleine where she stood thoughtfully on a terrace looking over Hyde Park. Within was music and the lilt of whispering feet, and over Hyde Park walked a moon. . . .

"Madeleine!" said he, and he looked so stern, but perhaps that was only the hazard of the moon.

"Denys!" said she, and she looked so happy, but surely that was only the hazard of the moon.

"Madeleine, I love you," said Denys, and she seemed to smile with her heart, and so they were engaged; but when he came back from France she said with a doubtful smile:

"Oh, this is absurd, Denys! We are too poor."

"Right, dear, right!" smiled Denys, and he never forced a smile; and so the engagement was declared null and void, and ever after they would laugh at themselves, how they had pledged themselves to one another without due thought to the amenities of life, which are so important.

NOW it is the way with people who play tennis like grim archangels that when they have ceased playing they instantly look as though they had been thinking of something else all the time. That, anyhow, is how Denys and Madeleine looked as they walked up the gentle slope from the tennis-court to the lawn—where, in the meanwhile, had blossomed a table set with the silver, china and napery of tea.

They loitered, they stopped. Madeleine's gray eyes, which silly men had said were the softest eyes that ever were, seemed absorbed in the blue carpet of the sea, and Denys seemed to have fallen into an unusual silence. And then came suddenly to them Mrs. Lyon's voice from within the house; but it might equally well have come directly from the plains of Dakota, which is next door to Minnesota, where all good things come from, even Swedes, flour, and Sinclair Lewis.

"Madeleine, Madeleine! Where are you?"

"Oh, damn!" said Denys. And Madeleine, awake at last, mocked him with a laugh.

"Dear Denys! What is the matter with you today? You have actually not smiled for five minutes! Smile, Denys, smile! There is so much to smile about, always, but always!"

"That's why, I suppose, whenever I come upon you alone you look as though——"

"Never mind that, Denys!" she laughed, but there was something quite sharp in the low, husky voice. "I'm not so often alone, remember, and so why shouldn't I have a little holiday when I am?"

"And, Madeleine, what are your little holidays?"

"Oh, dreams, just dreams!"

"Madeleine!" called the voice from the plains of Dakota. "Madeleine!"

"Run along, Madeleine!" said Denys; and, because he said it curiously, she stared at him, into him. He did not flinch at all. He did not know how to flinch, though, like all attractive men, he could every now and then look very shy.

"Despising me, dear?" she asked softly. He laughed like a schoolboy.

"Why, of course!" he said. "And myself. So that's that, Madeleine. After all, let's face our lives for what they are. I was a fool to leave the army, but I thought I would easily find a job of sorts. And you, Madeleine, were a fool to be born of a race of slack gentlemen, so that you like all the fine, easy things. I can't help thinking, dear, that we would both be so nice if only we had ten thousand a year——"

"Each?" she asked quite seriously.

"If you please," he said quite seriously. But by then she was obviously thinking of something else, for when she next spoke it was as though her voice came from a remote place, it was so low and impersonal:

"Would you have me changed, Denys? Would you have me a quite different Madeleine? Would you have me earn my bread with my hands; would you have me dressed in drab clothes; would you have my hair soiled with the dust of workrooms, while my eyes grew anxious with worrying and my face haggard with waiting for that which would never come, which is a curious thing called happiness?"

Everybody's Magazine, April, 1924

"Madeleine, for God's sake!" he pleaded against her bitterness, which was the worse for being so calm.

"But it is difficult, isn't it, for people like you and me? Brought up in luxury, brought up as children of the minor gods—and then, you know, quite penniless! And not trained to make a penny, either! Yes, it is difficult, I do think! You, at least, have prospects, for your mean old uncle might die at any moment—but me!"

"You, Madeleine!" said Denys. "Why, dear, your prospects are nearer than mine by a long way! Now you can't deny that, can you? All these rich men who would marry you . . ."

Always they would tease each other about her marriage. It was a joke, a fantasy. But today her fancy did not seem inclined to laughter, nor did she even smile, as she said:

"So far I've so hated the idea of earning my living that way. But now——"

"There's Dexter Harcourt," he teased her.

"Yes, isn't there?" she said, but her fancy did not incline her to smile. "He's going to ask me tonight. I feel it in my bones. And I am going to accept him tonight. I feel that in my bones, too."

"Madeleine, what sensitive bones you have today!"

"Madeleine!" came the voice from the plains of Dakota. "Madeleine, where are you?"

"I MUST go," she said swiftly. "I have to arrange for the party tonight. You're coming, of course?"

"Well, I don't know," he said doubtfully. "You'll be so busy, accepting Dexter Harcourt——"

"But that will only take a minute, Denys! If one can't make a mess of one's life in a minute, what can one do! Now do come!"

And swiftly she was walking away across the lawn.

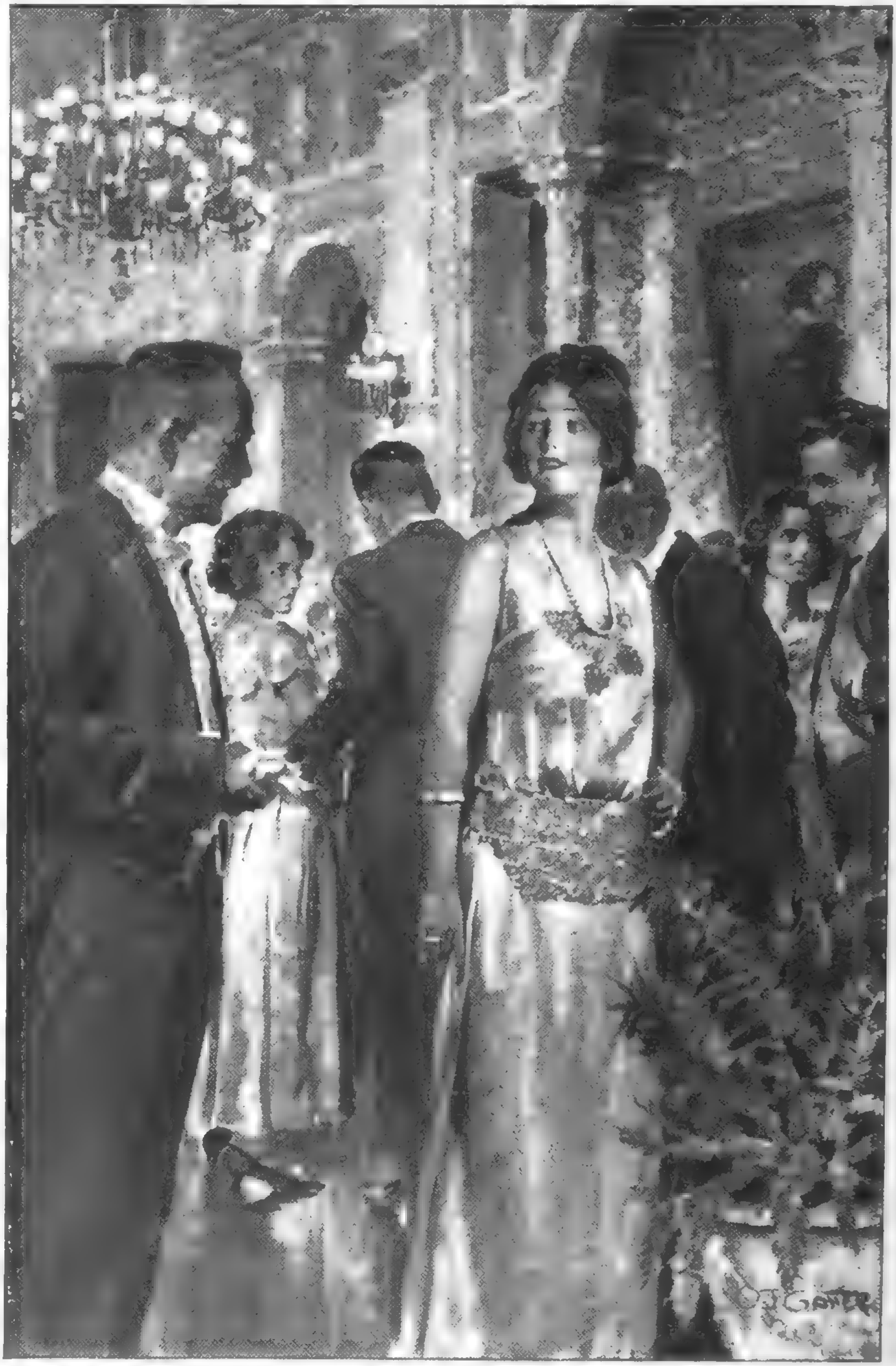
"Madeleine!" And the voice that called her name was recognizably the voice of Denys the jester.

The sun seemed to leap on the gold of her hair as she turned her face to him.

"Yes, dear?"

"Madeleine, didn't I once make a sweeping statement?"

"Once—and once upon a time, Denys! But only once!"



"I engaged you, messieurs, to prevent my jewels' being stolen, not to annoy my guests."

"One only repeats the things that don't matter, Madeleine. Shall I make an exception?"

"Denys, you are too serious!" she whispered into the sunlight.

"I love you, Madeleine."

Into the sunlit garden of the Villa Corydon walked the god of silence, and heavily he strode between them for a while. . . .

Then, because of this and that, Madeleine smiled.

"Dear Denys!" smiled Madeleine. "This is really very gratifying, after all these years!" And Madeleine smiled. "And, Denys, will there be any third time?"

"No," he said harshly. "No." And he left her, striding away down the little hill wreathed in bright yellow flowers, while she stood as he had left her, poised between a laugh and a cry. The laugh won. . . .

"Madeleine, Madeleine!"

NOW Cannes is, of course, a city of pleasure; and in a city of pleasure there is, of course, nothing on earth to do but kill time; so that quite a number of the people who were invited came to Angela Lyon's party, bringing with them a great number of people who were not invited—for why be selfish? Also, there were two tough-looking men.

"My, who are those two?" asked pretty Miss Hart of Denys Malaise, as they danced by the two tough-looking men, who stood in the doorway of the ballroom in dinner suits of unsymmetrical appearance and with expressions of forced geniality.

"Good Lord!" said Denys. "Wouldn't you know them a mile off, Eleanor?"

"Well, I'd prefer to know them a mile off than close to," she laughed, for Denys was a good dancer and she was enjoying herself. But even had Denys been a poor dancer she would have been enjoying herself, for has it not been said that he was an attractive young man, as young men go?

"Obviously," said Denys, "they are detectives. Oh, obviously!"

"Detectives!" sighed Eleanor Hart, and she was thrilled.

"Mrs. Lyon, you see, has some marvelous jewels and some funny superstitions: and the latter prevent the former from being locked up in a safe-deposit in the town, so the last time she gave a party some one took a fancy to a charming brooch of hers and also took the charming brooch. Therefore, detectives."

"Oh, look!" cried pretty Miss Hart. "How lovely Lady Madeleine looks in that jade-green dress! Of course, jade-green is a little out of fashion now, but——"

"Madeleine is the fashion," smiled Denys. "Where is she now? Dancing?"

"Over there. She's dancing with Dexter Harcourt."

"Dancing with Dexter Harcourt!" said Denys. "How you exaggerate, Eleanor! A woman doesn't *dance* with Dexter Harcourt—she lets him stand at attention on her feet."

Pretty Miss Hart looked furtively at the profile of her tall, fair partner, and she noticed that, when he thought he was not being watched, he did not trouble to smile. It was a stern-looking profile, thought pretty Miss Hart, and she suddenly understood what she had never been quite able to understand before, how Denys had been one of the most gallant and resourceful men in the war.

Miss Hart's father was a captain of industry in Chicago, but part of the time he lived in a villa at Cannes, for he believed that a little European Influence was a necessary ingredient of Poise, which is, of course, among the most recent of American inventions. Part of the European Influence he had picked on was Captain Malaise, who was staying with them.

Mr. Hart simply couldn't help respecting a man who did no work so efficiently as Denys. Mr. Hart was a really modern American, and had got beyond all that "hustling" and "booster" back-chat. "That young man," said Mr. Hart of Denys, "may have no money, but he sure has Poise." Pretty Miss Hart also thought Denys had Poise, and she was well prepared to listen to anything he had to say of a personal nature—but, somehow, he did not seem quite to say it.

"Who is this Dexter Harcourt man?" asked Denys suddenly. "He must be rich, by the money he throws away at the Casino."

"Well," said pretty Miss Hart, "he's very well known back home, and he's surely rich enough, even though Henry Ford might not be impressed. My father likes him."

"Yes, but your father also likes me," said Denys, "so that doesn't mean much."

"Difficult not to like you," said Miss Hart, very faintly.

Denys seemed to look right down into her gentle eyes, and his own looked grave and troubled.

"Do you really mean that, Eleanor?"

They danced.

"Yes," she murmured.

They danced.

"Bless you," whispered Denys. "God bless you, Eleanor. And He will, too."

Pretty Miss Hart had to bite her lip.

"It's too hot, dancing," she said at last. "Let's go sit in the garden—shall we?"

And silently they walked out through the French windows into the garden.

IT WAS about an hour later that, from the garden, a silhouette could be seen standing against one of the livid French windows of the ballroom. The silhouette seemed to be looking for a shadow in the recesses of the garden. That, anyhow, is how the shadow felt about it.

Then, suddenly, "The Sheik of Alabam" came to Cannes: the saxophone and the drum shattered the silence; and at the same moment the eyes of the silhouette seemed to have formed a shadow out of the night, for the silhouette came out into the garden and became a tall young man with a thoughtful face.

The shadow stirred a little on her white bench. She was in a jade-green dress, and she wore a doubtful smile, and when her companion on the bench said something she answered thus and thus. Her companion was a stalwart gentleman with a heavy, handsome face and very intelligent eyes.

"I think," said Denys to the shadow in the jade-green dress, "that it is now our turn to take the floor, Madeleine. Sorry to interrupt you, Harcourt."

"Go ahead," growled Dexter Harcourt amiably.

Madeleine rose, and her jade-green dress made a faint noise like hidden water, but she said never a word.

"Well, I think I'll come with you into the house," said Mr. Harcourt. "Getting cold here. One does get chilly, sitting out."

"Two shouldn't, so I've read in books," said Denys gravely.

"Ah!" said Dexter Harcourt. "What do you think, Lady Madeleine?"

"I am not thinking at the moment, Mr. Harcourt. Come, Denys, if we are to dance."

But, as they moved across the lawn, "The Sheik of Alabam" left Cannes as suddenly as he had come.

"They saw you coming," smiled Dexter Harcourt.

"They saw some one going, you mean," said Denys, with eyes intent on the suddenly stilled, grouped figures in the ballroom. "They shouldn't have stopped then; it was the middle of the tune."

"Oh, dear, something's happened again!" sighed Madeleine, for she felt responsible for Mrs. Lyon—who, as they stepped into the ballroom, rushed up to her. Mrs. Lyon was in a silver dress which would have looked charming on her daughter; but as she had no daughter she wore it herself. She looked flushed.

"Necklace," she just breathed. "Madeleine, my pearl necklace!"

"But you've got it on, dear!"

"Teclas!" trembled Mrs. Lyon. "The real ones were in the safe in my bedroom——"

"Lord, they're not stolen!" said Dexter Harcourt.

"Madeleine, what shall I do!" trembled Mrs. Lyon. "I am so upset, Madeleine. It is dreadful, dreadful!"

"Gee, but it's stiff luck," said Mr. Harcourt, "to throw a party and then get a rope of pearls shanghaied!"

"Darling, I'm so sorry!" said Madeleine very gently. "But surely the detectives——"

"Here they are," said Denys. "Shall I arrest them first, Mrs. Lyon, or would you rather they arrested one of us?"

"Denys, be serious!" pleaded Madeleine.

"Really, my dear, a chap can't be serious about a pearl necklace," pleaded Denys. "Can he, Mrs. Lyon? For of course they're insured?"

"Captain Malaise, you are so cute, and you're doing me so much good!" Mrs. Lyon smiled. "Oh, yes, they're covered!"

"Madame," began one of the two French detectives, a bad-tempered-looking man; and he talked closely to Mrs. Lyon for a while. Madeleine, while she listened, looked gravely round the excited groups of people in the ballroom.

"My!" gasped Mrs. Lyon. "He wants to search all the men!"

"And very reasonable, too," cried Denys. "Come on, Harcourt, let's strip as far as such stripping is compatible with the dignity of Anglo-Saxon gentlemen."

"Anglo-Saxon nothing!" snapped Dexter Harcourt. "I'm not in for this searching business. You're not serious, Angela!"

"As it's Mrs. Lyon's party," said Madeleine gently, "don't you perhaps think that it's for her to decide? After all, this is a rather—well—mixed party, and there are a good many uninvited people here—and among them, so the detectives say, two or three well-known Casino crooks."

"But also two or three gentlemen," said Dexter Harcourt.

"Come, let's not boast!" grinned Denys. He seemed to be enjoying the party.

"Captain Malaise!" exclaimed Mrs. Lyon, for the word "gentleman" was sacred to her; and then, because the lady from the plains of Dakota was a lady, even though she did want to get into society, she suddenly turned to the waiting detectives.

"I engaged you," she said, in that variation of French which French people always answer in English, "I engaged you, *messieurs*, to prevent my jewels' being stolen, not to annoy my guests. Thank you."

That annoyed the bad-tempered-looking detective; he nodded toward Denys and spoke closely and vehemently to Mrs. Lyon. Madeleine listened, and then laughed.

"Commedia!" laughed Madeleine. *"Commedia!"*

"What's the fool say now?" growled Dexter Harcourt.

"Me not fool!" snapped the detective.

"Yes, we have no bananas!" grinned Denys. "What is it, Madeleine? Is he accusing me of taking the pearls?"

"Oh, no!" trembled Mrs. Lyon.

"He doesn't go quite so far as that," laughed Madeleine, but she looked dangerously at the detective, who tried to look dangerously back. "He merely says he saw you going upstairs, and he would like to know what you did upstairs."

"And very reasonable, too!" said Denys, and very gravely he turned to the detective. "Monsieur, I went upstairs with a view to stealing the pearls. But when I got there the cupboard was bare——"

"We talk not of cupboards!" snapped the detective. "I have been observing you, monsieur."

"I only hope, then, that you'll be influenced by the fact that I wear *black* socks with a dinner jacket, whereas you seem inclined toward the colored-sock school of thought, which, I assure you, is not really modish. The question is, after all, should a plain-clothes man be so extremely plain?"

"Bah!" said the detective.

And "The Sheik of Alabam," he came to Cannes again.

"LET every one dance!" begged Mrs. Lyon. "This is too annoying. Captain Malaise, *please* don't notice them! Mr. Harcourt, won't you dance with me?"

"Won't I!" said Dexter Harcourt, and did.

"And, Denys, won't you dance with me?" asked Madeleine.

"My God, I wish I never need dance with any one else!"

And softly Denys and Madeleine danced, softly; and he was aware only of the golden head beside his own, and of the faint scent she used, and of the impotence of desiring the unattainable.

"Denys, why did you try to make fun of Dexter Harcourt? He's so nice, really."

Softly they danced, softly, each absorbed in the invisible thing over the other's left shoulder, which is the modern way.

"Madeleine, I'm madly jealous!"

"Denys, how absurd you are!"

"That's it, laugh at me! You have no heart, Madeleine. I can see the hole where your heart should be."

Softly they danced, softly; and it seemed to him that the short golden hair beside his cheek smelled as clean as grass; and his face grew white and set.

"So you like Harcourt," he muttered.

"Yes, frightfully!" she whispered.

"And of course you've accepted him?"

"Denys, I'm so weak!"

"My God, Madeleine, I can't bear it—your marrying him—or any one!"

"But, Denys, I said I was so weak!"

"Don't I know it!" he said savagely.

"Yes. So I refused him. You see, dear, I like him so much, he's really such a nice man, that I simply couldn't just marry him for his money."

"Madeleine, you're divine!"

"Whereas, Denys, I suspect you of designs on that pretty little Eleanor Hart. She adores you, I know."

Nimbly, he avoided an enthusiastic couple.

"I wish," he said, "that people wouldn't dance in open formation."

"Denys, are you going to marry Eleanor Hart?"

"Madeleine, I'm so weak!"

"Oh, thank God!" whispered Madeleine. "Are you doing anything tomorrow, Denys?"

"I wake up loving you. I have lunch, loving you. I play polo, loving you. I dine, loving you. I play baccarat, loving you. I sleep, loving you. That's all, dear."

"The Americans are right, Denys. What we English need is action, *action*. So if that's all you are doing tomorrow I thought we might fill in the time by going somewhere and getting married."

Softly they danced, softly; and, because of this and that, his profile was white and set.

"Denys, why don't you speak?" she whispered frantically "Don't you love me?"

"I said I wouldn't say it a third time, but I love you so much, Madeleine, that I'll stretch a point just for once. Madeleine, I love you." But that is all he said, and her feet seemed to her to grow heavy in the dance.

"Denys!" she whispered. "I am so miserable, and I thought I would be so happy, having decided to forfeit wealth and marry you. Denys, aren't you going to make a poor woman of me? I'll cry right in the middle of the ballroom if you say no. I will, I will!"

"Madeleine, I can't marry you," he muttered. "You don't understand. There's something——"

"The lack of money! Oh, I've got enough for the ceremony and a reasonable honeymoon."

"Oh, damn money! We can always go on the films, I suppose. Especially you. They're very partial to dukes' daughters on the films, Madeleine. No, there's something else. You can't marry a man like me."

"Denys, I don't understand," she pleaded.

"You see, dear, I'm a thief."

"Denys! Oh, my God!"

"I'VE got to tell you, Madeleine. You simply can't marry a man like me, a thief. And I've been a thief ever since the war, Madeleine. I got reckless after you thought again about marrying me. I've simply lived on stolen pearls, Madeleine, though, God knows, so many people wear Teclas nowadays. And it was I who took that brooch the last time Mrs. Lyon gave a party. So, you see, Madeleine, you can't marry a thief."

Softly they danced, softly, and each stared at the invisible thing over the other's shoulder, which is the modern way.

"Denys, my Denys! I shall marry the man I love, my Denys!"

"Madeleine, you can't mean that!"

"But I do, Denys! I can't bear your being like that, my dear. You'll promise never to be careless again, Denys? You'll promise to keep straight?"

"Madeleine, what will be the difficulty, married to you! I'll just work, I will. Yes, I promise."

And "The Sheik of Alabam," he left Cannes and returned to Alabama. The dance had ceased.

"So will I," whispered Madeleine, and a white hand fluttered to a secret part of her dress; and, he following her with bewildered eyes, she ran across the room to where Mrs. Lyon stood panting with Dexter Harcourt.

"Angela darling, the thief who took your pearls must have got frightened, for I've just found them by chance tucked away in the corner of that sofa there. I'm so glad, Angela. And you must be glad too, please, because Denys and I are going to get married almost at once, though of course we have no money and only the most septic prospects."

"Madeleine!" trembled the lady from Dakota. "My, I *am* so pleased. Captain Malaise, I was never so happy, I declare! Madeleine, you must accept these pearls as a wedding present from me. You must, please!"

Denys coughed.

"Eh—I think—" he began.

And Madeleine's eyes seemed quite dim.

"Angela, put your pearls away, dear. Pearls don't suit me, Angela, I assure you. I simply hate pearls, you know. Give me Teclas, any day."

"About all you'll get, married to me!" said Denys; and the rest of this story is quite uninteresting, for the marriage was successful, as marriages go.

Coming—another of Michael Arlen's fantasies.

We Have the Honor to Present Colonel Steptoe in

Forty Drops

Which Shows What Happens When a Gentleman of the Old School Invades Modern New York. A New Character and a New Author

By F. H. Hicks

Illustration by Joseph A. Maturo

AT NOON, when the telegram came, Colonel (by courtesy) Cassius Steptoe, scion of ancient Southern lineage, was still asleep in his high hall room near Union Square. But at the knock of the messenger, he leaped from his narrow cot, and, clad in a long nightgown, hurried to the door.

"E-yow-e! I was expecting that! By Nez! Where's my specs?"

"Sign here! Any answer?"

"No, my boy, no! I shall reply by letter, a long letter of deepest gratitude. I feel sure, little Mercury, you bring good tidings. Wait a minute!" To the boy, the Colonel presented two nickels, and quoted: "Good luck befriend thee, son; for at thy birth the fairy ladies danced upon the hearth."

"Huh!" said the little messenger, and departed.

Alone, the Colonel unbent, and, propping the telegram against a horseshoe on the rickety washstand, did a stiff little dance about the hall room, as he searched for his spectacles. Even in a nightgown, he was an elegant old gentleman, tall and slender, with long, silky, white hair. His face was a study in deep, pleasant lines and odd hills and valleys. He had a white, shaggy flowing mustache and white, shaggy eyebrows, from under which shone fine, fierce, venturesome gray eyes. His nose was large and arched, full of wrinkles, angles and corners, dents and pits, and brilliancy.

"I'd lay 10 to 1," he speculated, "20 to 1, she sent me two hundred! Damn those specs!"

At last, he found them, on their frayed black ribbon, atop a volume of Plato under the cot. "Now for some breakfast, and other things," he said, and opened the telegram with a smile of expectancy.

It read:

"No. —Henrietta."

"By Nez! How's this? By Nez! Could she have misunderstood my wire?"

On the back of an envelope, he found a copy of the telegram he had composed and sent (collect) last night to this same Henrietta. It read:

> As it is Sunday unable to finance myself at my New York bankers. No market at present for King Cole Mineral Water Company stock. To such a strait have the foregoing mischances reduced my personal exchequer I find myself entirely without funds temporarily. Immense transaction pending. Can you not telegraph me prepaid a hundred dollars please? Love to you my own dear cousin and to all the family. Wire money immediately. Means everything. CASSIUS.

He polished his spectacles, and read the first telegram again, and then turned it over to see if possibly on the reverse side was a further message; but its entire contents were "No. —Henrietta."

So the wealthy, hitherto generous Cousin Henrietta, his last resource, had deserted him, too!

He sought his cot again.

"Can it be," he mused, as he snuggled

under the faded covers, "that I am to be driven out into the world to seek work?"

HE HAD been an entire stranger to work for the past year, and though never on intimate terms with it, his sixtieth birthday had marked his definite retirement even from pretense at the usual pursuits in which the majority grasp a livelihood. But then, for generations and generations, all Steptoes had always retired at sixty. In truth, however, the case of the Colonel was slightly different from that of his forbears; for they had stored up a surplus to care for them in their old age, and the Colonel had overlooked that detail. But he had not allowed such a small thing to deter his retirement.

Soon after his retirement, his own home, Blue Grass Hall, laden with mortgages, had passed from his possession. And then for some months the Colonel had visited among the numerous collateral Steptoes of Pocahontas County. But finally his kinsmen, although fond of the old retired gentleman despite his minor frailties, had displayed toward him a certain coolness. Of a proud nature, he had thereupon mentioned the necessity of an immediate visit to New York, in connection with the promotion of a company to develop the Blue Grass Hall mineral springs, the rights of which he had retained when his farms had been wrested from him. And so in a few days, certain that eventually he would be more appreciated if now he absented himself from direct contact with relatives, he had managed to have Cousin Henrietta advance him a hundred dollars, and had gone to New York.

Until recently his retirement in New York had passed happily; all forms of conventional work had been flatly eschewed; nevertheless, at times, he had labored frantically. To his relatives, he wrote countless letters, and he expended many long hours and reams of paper to make them chatty, charming, and dignifiedly solicitous. He would accept gifts outright from relatives as far removed as the sixth cousin: he drew the line rigidly there. For appeal, though, this left a comforting multitude.

He did not allow his New York friends to dispense charity to him. He had a code. It was a practical, workable code, free from illusions and idealisms, like that of most gentlemen of his years; and, of course, he sincerely believed it functioned on a much higher plane than it really did; but, such as it was, he strictly adhered to it. The article of his code which dealt with friends permitted, and even encouraged, him to sell to them stock in his King Cole Mineral Water Company, and his stock certificates were masterpieces of engraving.

Best of all means for providing funds for budget purposes were the occasional windfalls, when a long shot at the races happened to finish first. Also there were numerous destitute times when the long shot ran true to form. The Colonel blithely forgot these.

Thus he had lived for a year in a harsh city; and the shield of his retirement was still free from the tarnish of work. Rather an adventure, he had thought; but perhaps too easy, too staid, to be a matter for boasts.

Then suddenly had come upon the Colonel black misfortune. His wealthy friends had migrated to their summer playgrounds. A strange silence had fallen upon his Southern kinsmen: possibly this field had been worked too exhaustively. And Mrs. Handy, his landlady, was becoming insistent, icily insistent, upon overdue rent. He had indited many letters and composed many collect telegrams—without response.

Now this meant that the Colonel had been for some time on emergency rations. He could manage to get along on desultory meals; but there was another ration that had come to be a necessity to the old gentleman, and that was Bourbon whisky. Not that the Colonel ever got drunk, or inebriated, or even tipsy; he only became mellow. But he must have a regular and plentiful ration of Bourbon whisky!

EVEN as he left a drink in the bottle for the morning, so he had held Cousin Henrietta in reserve. Only when all other sources failed him and his situation became desperate would he call upon her. And yesterday such a situation had indeed arisen; for with only one bottle of Bourbon left, he had been refused further credit by his bootlegger. He felt he had been justified, in his telegram to Cousin Henrietta, in saying, "Immense transaction pending."

"No. Henrietta!" said the Colonel with kindly mimicry, as he leaned over the edge of his cot and pulled from underneath it a battered suitcase. "She must have the neuralgia again. Anyway, I won't go to work. No, no, sir, no, siree! I've retired, and by Nez! I'm going to stay retired!"

From the suitcase he brought forth a long black bottle. He liked to have the first drink of a new day in bed. "Oh, something will turn up!" he said optimistically.

To his great horror, from the bottle only a mere sample of vital elixir trickled forth. His system was eager: the sample only quickened his appetite: he was not himself.

"By Nez!" he shouted, and, bounding from his rickety cot, searched his clothes frantically. He was always finding money loose in his pockets; but, in this instance, nothing was forthcoming; he had given the little messenger his last ten cents. And, crushed, he sat on his cot, his head in his hands, and moaned: "Oh, by Nez, oh! I must have drunk it all last night when I was putting the whip to that telegram! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

A crucial situation starkly confronted him. Either he must go to work and earn money to fill the long bottle again, or he must refuse to break the good record of a year's retirement, and do without the bottle. He felt this was a cruel decision to rise up before a man stricken in years.

His mind wandered back to old days when good Bourbon was as low in price as it was plentiful in volume. Old sweet familiar names came trickling through his memory: Old Crow, Golden Wedding, Pepper, Belle o' Nelson: he wondered if anywhere there was still a hidden treasure of those old friends. So far as he was concerned, they had vanished; he had not tasted their mellow delights in years. It was true the corn liquor, disguised as Bourbon, that he got from his bootlegger, when immense funds were forthcoming, was of fair quality, and if he had some now, 'twould serve, 'twould serve. But his chaste palate yearned always for the old kindly Bourbons of long ago.

He struggled against the dreadful temptation to go to work. It appalled him. It seemed a shame to retire, and then have to—unretire, as it were. But he was restless. He was depressed. He paced to and fro. At last he succumbed. He sought a morning newspaper and consulted the "Help Wanted" columns.

Not for him were any of the staid jobs, those monotonous rounds from house to subway to office, with no difference in the gray days of a year's office routine but dates, and then from office to subway to house. He searched for congenial work, something swashbuckling, something with shadows and perils. He came upon an advertisement in the W's after he had almost abandoned hope.

It said in print: "Watchman, for duty on North River piers, must come well recommended, be able take care himself and company's property under adverse circumstances. Apply to Mr. Higgins, office of the South Atlantic S.S. Co., foot of Sussex St., 3 o'clock Monday afternoon."

"Now," cried the Colonel exultingly, "that *is* an advertisement!"

IN MID-AFTERNOON, under the intent guidance of Mr. Higgins, superintendent of piers for the South Atlantic Steamship Company, the Colonel was selecting a weapon. Mr. Higgins, very burly, hands in hip pockets, legs crossed, head thrust forward, leaned against the door sill of the small room in which the Colonel was arming and, above the clatter of typewriters in the pier office, spoke solemnly of the duties and dangers of the position of night watchman, which the Colonel had condescended to assume.

"Now, Mr.—Colonel—Steptoe," faltered Mr. Higgins, referring to an employment card, and bestowing the title despite himself, "you are to report here to Mr. Rasmussun, the night superintendent, at six o'clock this evening—sharp!"

Of a sensitive nature, the Colonel was rankled by that last word. A stormy glare, however, found Mr. Higgins impassive, his red face disclosing no conscious intention to affront. His employer—the Colonel reflected—while perhaps overly striving, overly boisterous, was probably of good natural inclinations. And with forbearance, he put away slowly a tendency to overt reply.

The huge Mr. Higgins impersonally continued: "He will put you on at Pier 11, lonely place; and I want to impress that 11 is ticklish now. It's full of liquor" (in spite of waning umbrage and concentration on armament, the Colonel gave a visible start at this obsolete word) "waiting transshipment. We've already had a robbery there: Piffy Cuccini's gang: they bribed the watchman. Damn these bootleggers! The owner of the liquor, Mr. Bumsteam, put up a thousand dollars, and the South Atlantic added another thousand for Piffy's capture. But he's too slick to be caught!"

At this point Mr. Higgins emitted what the Colonel thought was a particularly thin, high, hacking cough for a man of such immense stature and voice; summer influenza, he concluded, and held his breath. After the paroxysm, Mr. Higgins said: "Your recommendations, Colonel, are more than O.K.; and further, I believe I know an honest man when I happen to see one. But this is a bad gang: they won't stop at nothing: they'll pull some stunt to get that liquor away from you. There's no telling what they'll do. They won't stop at murder!" He paused with this peroration to determine its effect on the militant one.

The selection of arms had narrowed to two revolvers. They were equally murderous-looking, equally long-barreled, equally large, but there was a shade of difference: one had a hair trigger that was a delight to touch; the other had two significant notches in its butt. Naturally the Colonel was wavering. He paid not the slightest attention to Mr. Higgins's expressive pause. He was calmly engaged in putting imaginary bullet after imaginary bullet, with alternate revolvers, through the exact center of a small knothole in the wall. He fondled the revolvers affectionately. His was a hard decision—hair trigger against notches. The pistol practice grew to a fusillade.

How clean he was, frayed slightly, clad in a high-waisted, double-breasted, tight-fitting pongee coat, and narrow trousers of military cut! His hat was rough straw, high-crowned, narrow-brimmed, too scanty to encompass his hair, so he wore it tilted genteelly over his left eye. Also, the Colonel had a penchant for colorful neck scarfs: this afternoon he wore the Steptoe racing colors, sky-blue and orange. And there was in his manner now something stern, avenging, as he stood, lightly poised on small feet, boot tops outlined faintly beneath trousers; long pistol-arm extended, a thin blue-veined hand resting nonchalantly on his reverse hip, pouring volley after volley into the knothole.

"I say," repeated Mr. Higgins, in a voice as though addressing sailors in a storm, "that Piffy Cuccini gang won't stop at murder to get to that liquor!"

With a sigh, the Colonel laid a hair-trigger blunderbuss lovingly beside a two-notched cannon; but first, as the table was dusty, he put underneath them a clean paper napkin, which, during financial tightness, was serving him as handkerchief; and drew back, artistically, to regard them. His was the same glance a little child might bestow at the choice of exquisite dolls. He could not decide!

He spoke as though his thoughts were far away. "Never mind about that liquor. It'll be safe with me. Let Piffy Cuccini come. Let Piffy Cuccini and his entire gang come. By Nez! Just let 'em come!" And now the Colonel was wildly flourishing hair-trigger in one hand and two-notch in the other. An idea came to him. "Mr. —er—Higgins," he pleaded tremulously, "would you mind if I took both of these little pistols along?"

AS HE paced efficiently and restlessly around the confines of Pier 11 that night, the Colonel came to the conclusion that work, congenial work, was not such a direful thing as he had anticipated. In time, he feared, the dangers might become conventional, his enthusiasm wane; but now he was like a boy playing at field marshal, except that the significant two-notch and the impulsive hair-trigger, in leather scabbards, were lashed about his martial waist and his manner was serious, deadly, annihilating. Not a man, he felt, to trifle with.

Pier 11 was smallish, as piers go, detached from the many larger piers of the South Atlantic Steamship Company, and surrounded by leaky launches with rotting awnings, and deserted barges. Inside, were spars, oily timbers, scraps of paper, coils of rope. The floor underfoot was damp, rough, scarred by hoofs of horses. Dusty lights, in a ceiling of rafters and cobwebs, gave forth a dim radiance, like that of a cathedral, outlining squat rows of liquor casks and tall aisles of liquor cases in the shadows. A tenuous, refreshing perfume stole lingeringly from them.

At first, the Colonel paid no attention either to cases or to perfume; his thoughts were centered entirely on the rigid performance of his duty. But not for long; this was contrary to the nature of things;

and soon, as he strode about, his large, arched nose was pointed upward, inhaling staccato draughts, searching; for in the blended incense that frolicked about him, he fancied, perhaps wildly, to distinguish the fruity, slightly farinaceous bouquet of Bourbon whisky. And he began to note meticulously the names stenciled on the ends of the cases. He found liqueurs, Scotch whiskies, Irish whiskies, vermouths, bottled cocktails, and absinthe.

"Bah!" he jeered disappointedly. "Soda pop, washes, ladies' drinks, medicines, poisons! Ugh! Who got up this collection of liquor, anyway? By Nez! It's more'n safe with me!"

So the night wore darkly on. And the Colonel remembered that the dead hours before dawn were those usually selected for military operations; and to forestall surprise, he took two-notch and hair-trigger from their scabbards, and carried them starkly, at the ready, in his hands. It was a hot, humid night, and all the noises of the streets had died down. He could hear the water swishing against the piles.

Then he heard, in a hitherto unvisited corner of the pier, what he trusted was the scampering of rats. He brought out a flask and drank from it. Just the usual bootleg stuff, obtained with money advanced on his thirty-dollar-a-week salary; and now this raw liquor was less palatable than before, possibly because of his thoughts of the gracious Bourbons of past days.

HE TURNED to go dutifully to investigate the scampering.

On he stole through the dim aisles. The scampering increased. With two sharp clicks the triggers of the deadly revolvers came to the cocked position. And the Colonel thought of Mr. Higgins's solemn warning. In all probability, this was Piffy Cuccini's gang! He came crouched over, treading lightly, tense, with two-notch and hair-trigger held menacingly before him, around a high stack of that poisonous absinthe. Here was a wider aisle with a light directly above it. From the next aisle came a sudden, sharp thump, as though of a heavy boot. The Colonel wheeled belligerently toward it, trying to peer through the stack of liquor cases that separated him from it.

He felt that his life was in jeopardy, and he was prepared to do battle for it intrepidly. As he sought to glare through the cases before him, he saw a name that made him forget the scampering, the ominous thump, Piffy Cuccini, all dangers, everything, but that name. It was Belle o' Nelson! His revolvers dropped by his side, swinging loosely; his mouth popped open; his eyes stared glassily. And then another old sweet name! and another! and another! Grand Dad, Mount Vernon, Chicken Cock, Overholt, Lee '61. He was dreaming. He knew he was dreaming! He closed his eyes and brushed his forehead shakily with the barrel of hair-trigger. And looked again. No. No! Old Darling, Sherwood, Littlemore, Blue Grass, Four Roses, stacks and stacks of Bourbon, all the old sweet names, and some more Grand Dad, and another high stack of Belle o' Nelson!

AT THE end of an hour, the Colonel had partially recovered from his terrific emotional experience. He had brought a small wooden box into the Bourbon aisle, and was seated upon it, looking sentimentally at his old, old friends. He was like a virtuoso in his art gallery. There was a strange, devoted, fanatical look in his eyes, which were still misty. There was lust in that look. And yet it was gentle.

Even as old songs will awaken dear memories of other days and places and people, so did each of the old names on the Bourbon cases have its own precious significance to the Colonel. Belle o' Nelson—Belle o' Nelson—Belle o' Nelson. That summer long ago, when he was young and handsome, and in love with, and courting, pretty Anne Taliaferro, he was drinking Belle o' Nelson all that summer. And Grand Dad. Why, he had switched to Grand Dad that winter when he took his string of horses to New Orleans to race. What a bright winter that had been! Melwood—his father's favorite. He had been brought up from cradle days on Melwood. Melwood. What sweet memories of childhood the dear old name presented!

A case of Belle o' Nelson, one too many to complete a stack, had been left in the aisle. Now if it were possible to have a particular favorite in such a galaxy of Bourbon delights, the Colonel's favorite was Belle o' Nelson. He went over and fondled the extra case affectionately; he patted it; he shook it gently and listened to its seductive gurgle; he ran his hand caressingly along its exterior. He found a board loose in its top! A wave of blood came rushing up from the tips of his toes, tingling through his entire body, to focus and to throb in his parched, panting throat. He was dizzy with desire, and leaned against a tall stack of Belle o' Nelson to steady himself. He realized he was confronted with the greatest temptation of his life. He was no thief. But he had never been tempted to thievery until now. He struggled.

He strode away forever. In spite of himself, he tottered back. He went on an extended patrol to a distant section of the pier. He came back. He resolved not to touch the little case. He ran his fingers underneath the loose board, and felt the cool, slim neck of a Belle o' Nelson bottle. He tore himself away. He stole back, and wrenched tentatively at the loose board. But he remembered his duty, his honor, his Steptoe blood, in time again to tear himself away. He essayed to put all thoughts of Belle o' Nelson behind him.

All night long he struggled. But just as ashen dawn was sifting through the cracks in the barred doorways of the pier, at that hour when vitality is most feeble, he succumbed. He rushed at the case of Belle o' Nelson, and tore madly at the loose board. But it would not give.

AT SIX o'clock, relieved from his night's vigil, the old gentleman was suffering, in left hand and right foot, from rheumatic pains. He limped wearily up the waterfront toward the South Atlantic office. A pert, scorbutic young man, with old eyes, finical clothes, and a cigarette, accosted him, very suavely requesting a few minutes' conversation on an important business matter, and suggesting they retire to the seclusion of a pier. So earnest was his manner, and so exhausted was the Colonel by his rheumatism and the night's struggle, that he accompanied him.

After preliminary exchanges: "You're the night man in 11, ain't you, Cap?"

"Yes," said the Colonel proudly.

"What they got in that pier?"

"Liquor!"

"Liquor! Is that so! Must be worth a lot of money—if it's good stuff."

"Well, young man, I don't know as it's any of your business, but there's some of the finest liquor in the world in that pier! Stacks and stacks of it—high stacks! There's enough old mellow Bourbon in there to keep the *whole* of Pocahontas County happy for a—a—week, maybe."

"Is that so!"

"Of course it's so! Or I wouldn't have told you!"

"Now-w-w. Tut, tut! Calm yourself, old handsome. Listen! I've got friends, here in town, that'd take a lot of that stuff—at a stiff price!" And experimentally: "How'd you like to go in with me on a little deal?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I'll drive up here tonight, say, with some trucks—or maybe a launch—all depends on the lay. You and me can split the winnings. Easy five thousand apiece!"

"Why, damn you! By Nez! What do you think I am!"

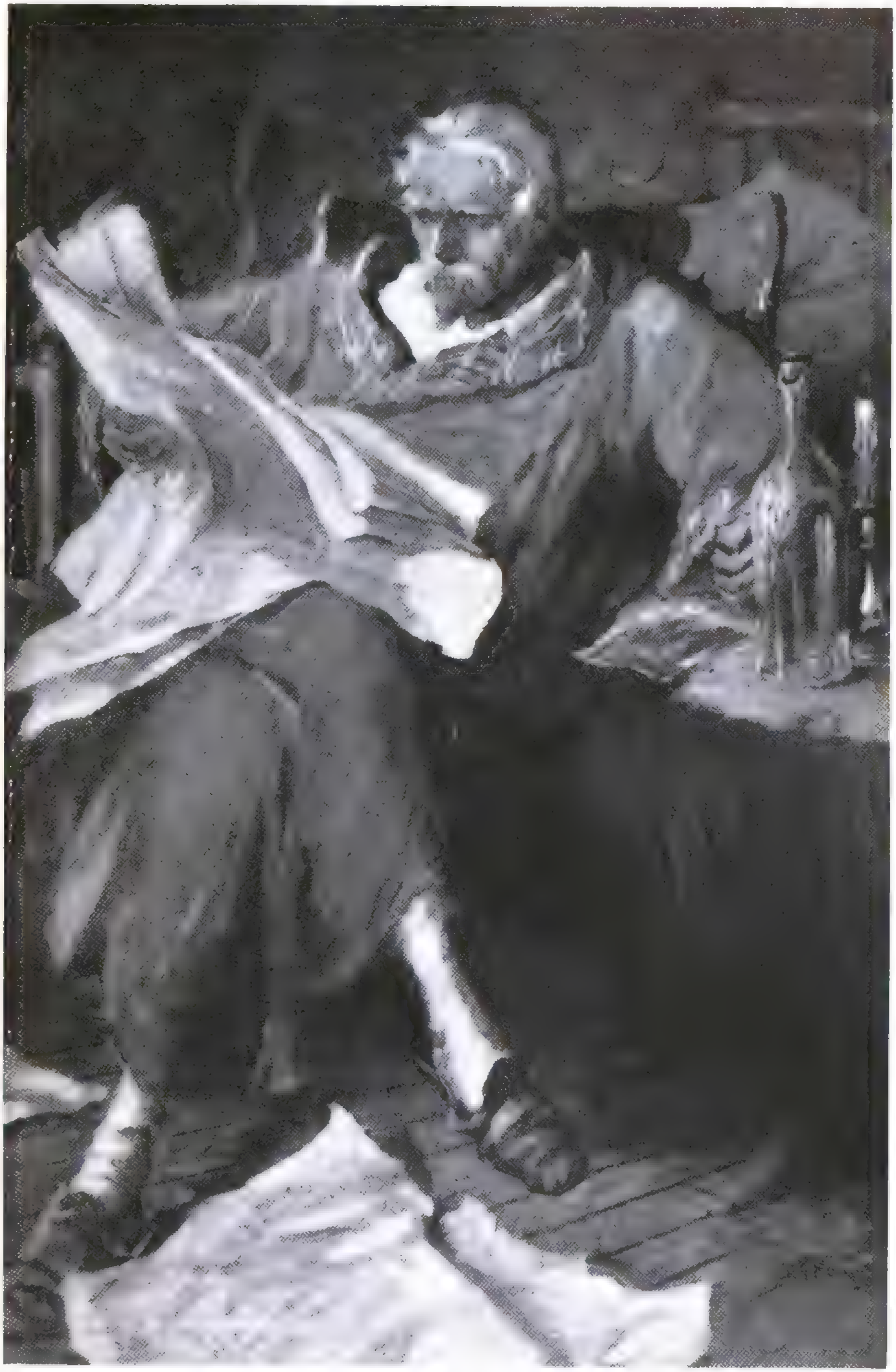
"Now, go soft, you old faker!" counseled the scorbutic young man cynically. "If that ain't enough, let me bring along a barge—see!—and I'll make it ten thousand!"

He found himself staring into the wicked cavern of two-notch. In support, the Colonel was trying to extricate hair-trigger from its scabbard, but his left hand, his main hand natally, was numbed by rheumatism.

"By Nez!" he was shouting, and simply appalling the young man by two-notch alone. "Damn you! Up with your hands! I'll turn you over to Mr. Higgins, the superintendent! Bribe me? A Steptoe! By Nez!"

As the two approached the office, a plain-clothes man who had been lolling conspicuously in the entrance, and who thought his bulgy, untailored appearance gave the certain impression of a wealthy, early-rising idler bound for Europe, unavoidably caught sight of them. "My word!" he drawled in his best café manner. "If it ain't my old friend, Connie! I been looking for you some time! How's all the Cookini gang? How's your boss, Piffy? Come into the office, please, till I call the wagon!"

MR. HIGGINS was delighted with the Colonel's probity and valor. He really embarrassed the old gentleman with his compliments.



Not for the Colonel were any of the staid jobs. He searched for congenial work, something swashbuckling, something with shadows and perils.

"Why, Colonel!" he boomed, between thin, high coughs. "You've no idea how hard it is to get a watchman for 11 that can't be bribed by that Piffy Cuccini gang. Cripes—I sometimes wonder who they can't bribe around here! I thought you was a bit old when I gave you the job. But I'm all for you now!"

A scheme had been unfolding in the Colonel's mind since his vain assault upon the Belle o' Nelson case, and as Mr. Higgins seemed to be in such a generous, laudatory mood, the present moment appeared propitious to consummate it. "Mr. Higgins—hem!" he said weightily. "Can I speak with you for just a minute in private?" And after they had withdrawn to a corner of the office: "Mr. Higgins—it's this way—I want to ask your permission to purchase a small case of that Belle o' Nelson over in 11 there—you can just charge it up on my salary. I——"

"No, Colonel Steptoe! No!" interrupted Mr. Higgins, cooling suddenly at the detection of a bibulous night watchman. "I can't let you have any of that liquor. The owner, Mr. Bumsteam, is here in town. He's the only one can do that!"

And he thought, as the Colonel hobbled dejectedly away: "I'm half of a mind to discharge 'im. Honest all right, and brave—but he drinks. And look at 'im—hardly able to get about. I can't afford to have a shaky old man in 11 just now. If he's that done up tomorrow, I'll have to let 'im go!"

So the Colonel was still lured by dread temptation. He was aghast at the ordeal of another night among the Bourbon sirens.

"DRIVER," said the Colonel, as he was motoring to the waterfront through the homeward-hurrying crowds, that evening, "stop at that little hardware store over there. One of the cases down at the South Atlantic piers, that I'm in charge of, is slightly broken open. I want you to get me a hammer to sort of tack it up with."

As the night grew darker, and the streets about Pier 11 became hushed, and the scampering of the rats started, the Colonel paced the gloomy aisles wearily, rheumatically, with two-notch and hair-trigger at the charge. But there was another enemy, a subtler, than the bootleggers to face. And this enemy, in the Colonel's mind, had come to be symbolized by that hammer. He had not intended to purchase that hammer. After a long day's struggle, he had entered the taxicab serene, confident, full of modest adulation for himself—his better self—at the complete victory over the great Bourbon temptation. And then he had espied suddenly the little hardware store, and had as suddenly, almost unconsciously, fallen into the clutches of his evil self again.

And further, a little contest, at which the Colonel was still vexed, had occurred with the hammer after its purchase. Upon repairing to Pier 11, he went immediately to the extra case of Belle o' Nelson, and tacked it up most securely. That, he felt, demonstrated his honorable intentions, and closed definitely the hammer incident. After which, he hurried to, and unbarred, the riverward doorway of the pier to throw the symbolic hammer far into the night. But though confidently he drew back his left arm, he could not toss the hammer away. He essayed the toss several times, each effort a little weaker than before. And then the thought came to him that possibly the impotence of his left arm was due to rheumatism, and he transferred the hammer to his right hand, and many times attempted to fling it away with this sound member, but strangely it would not leave him.

At last, he grasped the hammer in his left hand again, summoned every reserve of his will power, and with a great rush of feeling, entirely disregarding rheumatic pains, drew back his strong left arm, and hurled the hammer violently toward the Jersey shore. Now, in all probability that hammer would now be reposing at the bottom of the North River, except that with a terrific jolt, that almost threw the Colonel off his feet, the guilty hammer absolutely refused to be separated from his hand. It even now rested maliciously, triumphantly, in the rear pocket of the Colonel's pongee trousers.

He swore at the hammer. It might have won the partial victory of refusing to be thrown away, but it could never, never, entice him to thievery. So far, however, he had not thought it advisable to venture again into the Bourbon aisle.

But now, certain of himself, certain also that duty was calling, he boldly undertook a patrol in the Belle o' Nelson direction.

He saw it!

And the little case seemed to be smiling at him, as it nestled trustfully on the floor, even as a simple watermelon will smile, in the moonlight, at a darky.

But he knew he could face it.

" 'I will be lord over myself!' " he quoted.

Then suddenly the revolvers dropped from the Colonel's hands, clattering on the floor; he drew the hammer violently from his trousers, and, emitting strange little inarticulate cries, pounced upon the gentle Belle o' Nelson case. A resounding, smashing thwack shattered the hush of Pier 11, when——

A POUNDING came on the street doorway of the pier, and a rattling of the sagging chains at this entrance. The Colonel came to himself as a deep sleeper awakening. He drew a shaky, indecisive hand across his damp forehead. "Oh, by Nez! What *am* I doing!" he cried in a great voice, and secreted the hammer, armed himself, and stole warily to the door.

It was Mr. Rasmussun, the night superintendent. And with him was a slender young man, with a light mustache, horn-rimmed spectacles, and a businesslike air.

Mr. Rasmussun: "What was that noise I heard?"

"Oh, that! That?" said the Colonel. "Oh, that's—that's those big rats jumping about! Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" repeated Mr. Rasmussun. "Very likely! Well, anyway, this is Mr. Bumsteam, the owner of the liquor. He particularly wanted to see you."

The Colonel was indeed delighted to meet the owner of such high stacks of ancient Bourbon whisky, and putting two-notch into its scabbard, he shook Mr. Bumsteam's hand vigorously.

"Colonel Steptoe," said Mr. Bumsteam, "Mr. Higgins phoned me this morning, and recounted your brave and honest conduct in the affair of the bootlegger who tried to bribe you. I wanted to thank you personally. Colonel, I appreciate your valued efforts in my behalf! And also," he sweetly continued, "Mr. Higgins spoke to me concerning your desire to purchase some Bourbon whisky. Now, I would be gratified, Colonel, if you would allow me to present you with a case or two of Bourbon. Of course, you understand, this little interchange must be kept secret, strictly secret!"

It was like a fairy story.

But the Colonel finally recovered, and replied in a long, courtly discourse, the whole of which could be condensed into a single pertinent sentence: "I shall be most honored to accept some cases of Bourbon whisky!" Mr. Bumsteam made an excellent impression on him.

"And which particular whisky, Colonel, do you prefer?" asked the generous Mr. Bumsteam, as the three stood in the sacred Bourbon aisle.

"Why, Mr. Bumsteam, I—don't—know!" said the Colonel, with a return of his old finesse, since his luck was again at flood tide. "Let's see! I had thought a little—that is, I had a slight desire for some of that—that—what's the name? What *is* the name of that Bourbon? Oh, yes! Belle o' Nelson, that's it, Belle o' Nelson!"

"As good a whisky as was ever distilled!" Mr. Bumsteam smacked his lips. "Why, here's a case of Belle o' Nelson on the floor! And—look!—it seems to have a hole knocked in it! Why, if we had a hammer, we might open this damaged case now! How'd you all feel about a little drink?"

The eyes of the Colonel glistened again with that strange, devoted, fanatical look. "Why, yes, yes, Mr. Bumsteam, thank you, thank you! I'd be glad to have forty drops of Belle o' Nelson with you! As for the hammer—let's see! I saw a hammer about the pier, somewhere! Where was it? Just let me look round for a minute. I'll find it!"

AFTER a discreet absence, the Colonel produced that hammer. And the case of divine Belle o' Nelson was opened. And Mr. Bumsteam, fortunately, had a corkscrew. And, at last, they drank!

" 'O Bourbon, thou divine!' " quoted the Colonel rapturously, with his eye on the bottle now returned to Mr. Bumsteam's hand. " 'Babe of Kentucky! Twine——' "

"Well, thanks, Mr. Bumsteam," interrupted the night superintendent. "I got to get busy on that cargo of mutton." He departed, and the Colonel continued:

"'—about me those fondling arms of thine! Bring mirthful laughter to these mirthless lips o' mine!'"

"Have another!" said Mr. Bumsteam, proffering the bottle.

"No!" said the Colonel, as he reached into the Belle o' Nelson case. "No! Let this be one of my gift cases! You have a drink with me, now!"

So Mr. Bumsteam and the Colonel had another. And another. And the hours fled. And another.

At intervals, the Colonel would arise, arm, and absent himself, for a time, in the performance of his duty.

Mr. Bumsteam was a good raconteur, a most convivial comrade, and a man to carry his liquor.

And the night tripped on!

MR. HIGGINS was at the South Atlantic piers early the next morning. He went over to Pier 11, for he wished to see the Colonel's condition after a second night's watch, expecting regretfully he would have to discharge him. To his surprise, he found the old gentleman alert, free from rheumatic pains, striding about the pier like a buccaneer, with a deadly cannon in either hand, a flush upon his cheeks, clear eyes, refreshed after his long night's vigil. To the astounded Mr. Higgins, he seemed younger than before.

"Colonel," he said admiringly, "I don't see how you stand it! A man of your age, up all night, and dangerous work, too! I only hope, when I'm your age, I'll be able to look as fresh after a night's shift as you do! And to think that yesterday morning I figured you was about all in!"

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing!" decried the Colonel. "This work is a pleasure to me, a real pleasure, sir! I haven't felt so vigorous in years!" And he made some passes in the air with two-notch and hair-trigger.

Mr. Higgins coughed hackingly. "It's this damn summer cold! I can't get rid of it! And I thought yesterday *you* had a touch of rheumatism!"

"Oh, that! Oh, that's all gone! Just a slight return of my old gout. And by the by, Mr. Higgins, allow me to suggest a remedy for that cold. Get a bottle of Belle o' Nelson from Mr. Bumsteam—he's very generous—and tonight, 'fore you go to bed, heat some water, just as hot as you can stand it, and make yourself a hot Bourbon toddy—not too much water!—and drink it, drink it right down! Cold be gone tomorrow!"

Mr. Higgins was slightly ruffled at such advice from a night watchman, but he could not but feel kindly toward this hardy old gentleman. He asked genially, as he started for his office: "Anything unusual happen during the night?"

"Why, yes!" said the Colonel hesitatingly. "There's a little matter I wanted to speak to you about. You can handle it, and keep it quiet! But the fact is, Mr. Bumsteam, you know, the owner of all that liquor, came down last night—many thanks to you, Mr. Higgins!—and we drank a little something, not much, just a little Bourbon. It was a most abstemious night, but I reckon Mr. Bumsteam—er—wasn't feeling well to begin with—only way I can explain it—we drank so little! We opened up a case of Belle o' Nelson—just like milk!—one of those small cases too, only a dozen quarts—most abstemious night, for I noticed awhile ago a couple of bottles still left in the case. Why, we call this having forty drops down in Pocahontas County! He must have surely been sick—he's lying down back there. By Nez! I can't understand it—maybe he was seasick."

"DO YOU mean he's still here?" asked Mr. Higgins excitedly. "Where is he?"

"Oh, I fixed him up a sort of a couch, out of pine boxes," replied the Colonel, his clear gray eyes twinkling a bit, "and he's lying down back there in the Bourbon aisle."

"Come on!" said Mr. Higgins, leading the way rapidly to this aisle.

Mr. Bumsteam lay on his back upon the pine boxes. His horn-rimmed spectacles had been broken during the convivial night. He was as dead to the world as the Belle o' Nelson distillery.

Mr. Higgins rushed over to him. He tore at the blond mustache. It came off in his hands.

"By God! Colonel!" he exclaimed exultingly. "Congratulations! The two thousand dollars are yours! It's Piffy Cuccini!"

The engaging old Colonel Steptoe will appear again in May EVERYBODY'S—out April 15.

Tawny Death

Calloway Doesn't Go to the Jungle for His Characters. He Makes the Animals Around Us Live in Story Form

By Artemus Calloway

A RIFLE cracked. Darkface froze in his tracks, too frightened to move. And then, with eyes almost popping from their sockets, he saw the other raccoon—until a few moments before stretched lazily on the great oak branch—loosen his hold and drop heavily to the ground. The hunter rushed forward to gain his prize.

Then Darkface acted hurriedly. One moment he was there. The next—a racing shadow. On and on he went, never pausing to lay false trails, never stopping to listen for sound of pursuit. Somehow he seemed to know that his danger now lay only in the vicinity of that terrible stick carried by the man. That thing which spoke in a sharp, loud tone and caused the swamp animals to drop in lifeless heaps. Twice during the last week he had seen the hunter; three times he had heard the death crack of the rifle—once had found a rabbit mortally wounded, and now had seen the thing kill. He was thoroughly afraid.

But he seemed to sense, instinctively, that the hunter had no dog, no loud-mouthed tracker to nose out his trail—that if he could only keep out of sight he was safe. . . .

Not always did the raccoon come forth by daylight. But this was late afternoon and heavy clouds hid the sun, bringing that which was closely akin to early twilight to the south Alabama swamp. And Darkface had started forth to forage, passed the oak just as another coon left his den high up in its trunk and walked out on a branch to look about before also making his way to the ground. Darkface had sighted the hunter. He had stopped, regarded the man, himself unseen; had been interested in his actions; curiously regarded the raising of the long sticklike thing across his arm. Then had come the report. After that—death.

The unusually dark-faced raccoon raced on and on. Finally, with something like three-quarters of a mile between him and the fire-spitting instrument of death, he halted, looked about him. Bit by bit his usual calm returned. And finally he again sensed the need for food—that he had come forth to forage.

The raccoon stretched his great grayish body; a little grunt escaped his mouth; his sharp nose tested the late afternoon breeze. Then he turned away toward a near-by pond; reached it, searched about, found a shallow place, eased a queer little handlike forepaw into the cold water, down until it touched the black oozy mud below, felt about. He found that which he desired—a fat and juicy crawfish. Carefully he brought the wriggling crustacean from the water, eyed the thing critically for a second, then dipped it back. Darkface was hungry but his food must be washed before entering his mouth.

With short, quick little movements of his paw, the cleansing process was completed and the morsel placed between strong, eager jaws. Then he resumed fishing, caught another—others.

Finally, appetite satisfied, he drew away from the pond. Night had fallen. Unhesitatingly he plunged into the midnight blackness of an ivy thicket. Then—stopped suddenly; stiffened.

He had caught a danger scent. Not that of the man but of an animal, a killer new to this section of the swamp—an animal with which Darkface was entirely unfamiliar, yet which he knew, instinctively, to be the greatest danger the swamp held.

He had no way of knowing how or why the panther was there. He did not know how far to the south the swamp extended; that down in the southernmost end there were a few panthers and that this, a young one, sorely pressed by hunters and their dogs, had finally drifted northward to find new and safer hunting grounds.

He did not know that the thing was ravenously hungry; that there had now come renewed fear to the great tawny beast. He did not know that the arrival of the hunter had startled the cat just as it had himself.

DARKFACE'S swamp knew but few hunters. They seldom troubled; and it was perhaps because there had been no dreaded man scent there that the panther had come. But now he had found it. It had not, however, driven him away. This was one man. Back where he had come from there were many; and this one had no hated dogs to worry, to find trails. But the panther must be careful. And he was hungry.

That he was close was evident. Darkface's long, sharp nose told him that much. So, he went ambling on, twisting and turning about, throwing false trails just as if the feared one had been a dog. Somehow he seemed to sense that the other might trail him.

And the great cat was trailing him, slinking along behind like a shadow. It was very dark in the swamp now. There was no moon. But neither the raccoon nor the panther needed light. Their keen eyes could penetrate the darkness.

For more than an hour the panther held to the trail. Then Darkface came to know, instinctively, that he was no longer followed. Why, he did not know. He did not know that other and less wary animals had come into the panther's path, furnishing a meal; that he was, for the time being, but little interested in the raccoon.

When daylight drew near Darkface found his den, high up in a hollow sweetgum—slept. But his sleep was troubled. The great cat was somewhere not far away—a danger.

Late that afternoon the storm broke. It shrieked and howled through the swamp, uprooting small and rotten trees, tearing branches from oak, tupelo and cypress. And then came the rain. All that night it rained; the next day and night. There was no chance to get out to search for food. And when the clouds finally dispersed Darkface was well-nigh famished.

But all day he remained in his den. The sunlight was too bright for him to venture forth. Darkness would come.

And come it did. Almost as soon as it was dusk Darkface crept forth, stopped and ate a few berries that he found on a bush, trotted on to a crawfish pond, began fishing.

Again came that dreaded scent—the scent of the tawny killer. Darkface read the message the soft late fall breeze brought him as one reads a book. Not more than three hundred yards away was the panther, slipping along, his heavily padded feet making scarcely a sound on the leaf-carpeted ground.

With the telltale scent Darkface catapulted away; left the pond, hurried southward, skirted a stinking, brush-littered slough, crossed a sluggish stream, neared the little river into which the stream emptied, turned, circled. And all the time he knew that the cat was following.

He was frightened; frightened at this hunter that came on and on; frightened at this new, strange scent which spelled death.

Once the wind changed. Darkface became frantic. He couldn't tell whether the cat was still following or if he had given up the chase.

The raccoon was afraid to attempt the laying of false trails. There was no telling, with the wind against him, when he might run into the other. And somehow, instinctively, Darkface felt that there was a feud between the tawny beast and himself; sensed, in some manner, that the cat wanted *him*—not some other animal, but Darkface; that he was angry at having been thus far outwitted. And there came to him both fear and hatred of the great tawny death that trailed.

He dashed ahead; gained the river; traveled alongside its muddy waters until near daylight. And then, with his fear somewhat abated but still extremely cautious, he made his way by a circuitous route to his den, reached it in safety.

That night he again came forth. And he hadn't traveled more than three hundred yards before he sighted the panther. His heart pounded. The light of terror burned in his eyes. The cat near his den . . .

AS DARKFACE watched, the tawny beast moved slowly about in a little open space between a giant cypress and a lightning-struck stump. Lean, muscular body, well-set legs, claws to rip, long teeth to tear, cold, cruel eyes—all bespoke death.

But the wind was in Darkface's favor; the cat did not scent him. More, he appeared interested in something high up in a pine. He moved away from the cypress; reached the other tree, climbed it, ran a forepaw into a hole and brought forth a shrieking gray squirrel; squeezed the life from the trembling body; dined.

Like a shot Darkface was gone. What he had seen chilled. Dens afforded no protection. This strange enemy could snatch a victim from his bed. Other killers Darkface had found harmless so long as he was inside his home. But this one . . .

And then again came that scent. The panther was coming. The raccoon redoubled his speed.

A frightened rabbit dashed past. It, also, had scented the tawny death. But Darkface was not interested in the rabbit's troubles. He possessed sufficient of his own.

An owl hooted and the suddenness of the noise came near causing the raccoon's death. And now, thoroughly frightened, he sought the canebrake.

Here he found a trail made by the little black bears, wild hogs and other animals; followed it—and then, instinctively, sensed that the panther had also found it; stopped.

Darkface appeared to know that this place could easily prove a trap; that out in the comparatively open swamp he could turn in any direction he desired; that here, if he made speed, he could only follow the trail. He knew not where it led. And the panther was the faster runner. Heretofore only cunning had saved Darkface.

And then his blood froze. From behind came a wild shriek of rage; pain; fear; then quiet. The panther, following Darkface, had found a wild pig; had abandoned the chase, for the time being, for the easier gained meal.

Scarcely seeing where he went, the raccoon deserted the trail, dashed into the denseness of the brake, lunged ahead, slowly and painfully made his way out—away.

Everybody's Magazine, April, 1924

He was frightened and tired—panting. But of this he seemed unaware. He traveled as rapidly as possible up the sluggish creek; stopped once as he heard a noise ahead; went on when he discovered that it was nothing but a fierce-eyed mink.

The night wore through. Still Darkface did not seek his den. He had seen the squirrel cornered, pulled from his home, eaten.

But finally, when the sunlight had brightened the swamp, when redbird chirped and blue jay shrieked, when owls glared balefully at the light from their dark refuges, he instinctively felt that he must find a bed. He searched about until he came to an oak some distance from his former home, discovered a hollow and denned up.

That night the panther failed to appear. What Darkface did not know was that the beast, gorged on his fresh pork feast, was lying up; was not, for the moment, overly interested in the chase. Toward morning the coon was feeling more at ease; but he did not return to the sweetgum—nor even to the oak. Instead, he sought refuge that day in an old stump.

That night he again caught scent of the panther; and again the next. All the time, now, he was forced to elude the beast. The raccoon lost flesh; took no interest in the swamp life about him. The only thing that interested him was the panther—and that in a terrifying way.

His eyes became red, with a wild, hunted look. He was nervous, jumpy, and became cross and ill-natured, bullying the other raccoons with which he came in contact. He slept first in one place, then another—rarely two days in the same place.

His long grayish coat assumed a neglected appearance; ring-streaked tail drooped listlessly. But always his keen ears, watchful eyes and alert nose were on guard.

Then came the storm which marked the change from late fall to early winter. For three days the wind wrought havoc, uprooted trees and destroyed animal life. There were blinding flashes of lightning, rolling thunder, and the rain fell—cold, biting rain that chilled. The swamp became a dismal place indeed.

Suddenly the skies cleared again. And with the reappearance of the sun came renewed hunger pangs—that gnawing demand for food that the raccoon had fought for hours. Ordinarily about this time of year he was fat—could hibernate during bad weather; but now he was lean. The panther . . .

HUNGRY though he was, the raccoon would not venture forth in the bright sunlight; he remained denned up until mid-afternoon. Then clouds gathered in the west, hiding the sun. The swamp appeared gloomy, dark. He crept forth.

The raccoon trotted swiftly along until he reached a pond. There he stopped to feast. And feast Darkface did for several minutes, until his hunger was nearly satisfied.

Then again the panther scent, this time near by. Darkface deserted the pond and set about laying cross trails. And always behind was the enemy. The breeze told him.

This time it appeared that the tawny death was not to be eluded; that he had determined to run this one raccoon to earth; that it had become a matter of pride—or vengeance for so long having been defeated. He was tireless on the trail, quick.

Darkface was becoming desperate. His shrewd white-and-black-marked face appeared tired, worn. His breathing was irregular. Like one that knows he is beaten he raced alongside a wide pond for a distance, then swam across; trotted off, waited; listened; scented. Then he went ahead again. The panther had picked up the trail.

And now the raccoon was bound for the higher part of the swamp; was hurrying toward a certain knoll. Beyond that was marsh—many sloughs—where an enemy might be outwitted.

Darkface neared the knoll. The breeze told him that the panther was gaining. The coon reached the top of the hillock, looked about; then froze in his tracks. Fear gripped, held him.

For perhaps twenty seconds he remained there as motionless as the dead grass partly concealing him, and gazed at the little open spot to the right.

And then he wheeled, turned back in the direction from which he had come.

For something like fifty yards the raccoon went on. Again he stopped—waited. The breeze hit him full in the face. The panther scent was strong. Still the raccoon waited. And then through the trees he caught sight of the great reddish cat. Still he waited; moved. The cat saw him, and came bounding.

Then it was that Darkface turned and ran; ran as never before; ran as only fear could make him—straight back to the knoll from which he had come. He darted into the dead grass; dashed on for forty feet; stopped.

The panther leaped into the open, then stopped suddenly—so suddenly that it must have jarred; turned—but it was already too late.

A rifle cracked—once, twice, thrice. The tawny beast leaped straight into the air, half turned, again the rifle spoke. The big cat dropped, spitting, snarling, half screaming; struggled; became still; was dead. The hunter eased cautiously forward, still trembling from sudden surprise and fright at the unexpected appearance of the panther. And then, with half believing eyes, he gazed proudly upon the beautiful skin that was his.

For a moment only did Darkface tarry. He waited only long enough to see that the panther was dead. Then away.

He feared the hunter—the same one that he had seen kill the other raccoon only a few days before. He had been badly frightened when he ran suddenly upon him in that open place; but he feared the panther more. The man could not trail. And the breeze was toward the man—not from him. The panther could not scent.

So, without having been seen by the hunter, Darkface had turned and faced the great cat, led him on to meet death at the hands of another enemy—one whom Darkface could easily outwit.

AFTER a bit the raccoon halted. A contented sigh burst from his throat. A queer little grin appeared about his mouth, his sharp little eyes seemed to twinkle.

Darkface stretched lazily, then ambled on after the manner of one that has suddenly found the world very, very good and is glad to be alive—and in it.

Coming—another story of the Alabama swamp by Artemus Calloway.

The Fight of a Girl to Come Clean

The Devonshers

Held for Murder—Dave Devonsher, Horse Thief or Honorable Man?—Is It Jail for Eve?

By Honoré Willsie Morrow

Illustrations by Ernest Fuhr

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

"THE Devonshers, Major Colbaith, fear neither God, man nor the devil."

"But they fear life—the common lot—their own heritage?" drawled Peter.

Eve stared at him. . . .

In his branding corral, as the rising sun shot clear of Gray Bull Mountain, Minnie Duncan found the body of her husband Angus. Answering her hysterical telephone message, Sheriff Brownell, her father, drove out from Antelope Basin with the coroner, Henry Worth. But at the inquest little could be told: only that Angus Duncan was killed at close range with a bullet from a .44 rifle. His horses were missing but, as Sid Brownell said, ordinary horse-runners were not at all likely to kill. Minnie declared that she knew of only one enemy—Eve Devonsher, who had had more than one row with him; and she was in France. As for .44 rifles, only two were known to be owned in Antelope Basin. One of these belonged to Henry Worth; but when he confidently looked for it in its accustomed place, it was not to be found. The other was dead Dave Devonsher's, and Eve had taken it with her to France.

While the inquest seemed to have achieved nothing, for one onlooker, Major Peter Colbaith of the British army, it threw a strong light on the community feeling toward the Devonsher family, of whom only two remained: Dave's daughter Eve, and his widow Mary.

From the time Eve's grandfather Carter Devonsher came to Antelope Basin, followed by Henry Worth's half-breed father, the Devonshers had been among the leading ranchers—proud, hot-tempered; loving horses, spending much effort on improving their breed. Dave had died under a cloud, and that cloud still darkened the lives of his widow and daughter.

During the World War, crippled Major Colbaith came to Wyoming in search of horses for the Allies, and prices seemed to be limited only by the persuasion of Eve Devonsher, who lost her temper with Angus Duncan, between whose family and hers hate was traditional. Later she lost her temper for the same cause with her fiancé, and broke with him. It was then that she had left home, announcing her intention to go to France.

After the inquest the sheriff recruited two volunteers for a bear hunt—Judge Jones and the major. But the "bear hunt" turned out to be a further search for the murderer. In camp beside a stream they found Eve Devonsher. Immediately suspicious, the sheriff, with the judge reluctantly agreeing, proposed to take her back by force. Peter would not stand for this. In private he urged her to go back voluntarily. At last:

"My God, Miss Devonsher, go into the fight and take what comes! Or are the Devonshers all moral cowards?"

It was a shot in the dark but Eve turned on him as if he had struck her in the face.

"The Devonshers, Major Colbaith, fear neither God, man, nor the devil."

"But they fear life—the common lot—their own heritage?" drawled Peter.

Yielding, she called the judge and the sheriff.

"Honest, I'm just doing my duty as I see it. I like you. Why, my father served your grandfather," Sid told her.

He put a fat hand on Eve's arm. She struck it from her with passionate fury. "Don't lay finger on me, you—you server of Devonshers!" she exclaimed.

SID'S stout red face quivered as if Eve had slapped it. He stared at her with a look at once astounded and deeply hurt.

"I'm willing to play the game," Eve went on sternly; "but I'm not going to try to cover up a situation like mine with sentimental gush."

She led her horse to the creek and let him drink before she looped the reins over a drooping spruce branch. Then she stood beside the fire watching the men prepare her lunch.

Judge Jones volunteered to break her camp for her while she ate.

"There is nothing to do," said Eve as she attacked the steak with obviously small appetite, "but to bring the pack horse across the creek. He's adorned with all my possessions."

"You'd better eat hearty." The judge glanced with disapproval at the full plate. "It's a God-awful trail, as you know, and we want to work back fast."

"Why the haste?" asked Eve, deliberately scraping the remainder of her lunch into the creek and tossing the tin plate to Sid.

"I have business to attend to," replied Judge Jones, his lone eye twinkling.

"Still, one doesn't try to keep office hours on a bear hunt," suggested Eve, patting her horse on the neck and looking to the girth before mounting. "This horse, major, is out of the Arab strain my father brought to the Basin. If, by any chance, I should be definitely deterred from going to France, I wish you'd see that Shawnee gets there."

"I propose to do my utmost to help you as well as Shawnee to reach France," returned Peter, mounting his big blue roan. "What order of march, sheriff?"

"I'll lead," replied Sid, still hurt. "You and Eve follow, judge brings up the rear with the pack horses." He turned his horse down the creek and the little cavalcade jingled after him.

Their formation, due to the roughness of the country, was necessarily too loose to permit conversation. Peter would have given much to know what thoughts thronged Eve's mind during that long summer afternoon. He pushed the roan as close as possible after Shawnee's cream and brown flanks but Eve's straight shoulders and lifted chin, when he caught her profile, did not invite speech, even had Peter been able to ride beside her. But he watched her with unceasing interest.

Her coat was rolled and tied to the saddle behind her. She wore a dull green flannel shirt and a wide rider's belt, studded with paler green and black enamel arabesques. Her clothes had seen rough usage but they fitted her with an air. She had a distinction, even after these mysterious weeks in the forest and in spite of her obvious weariness, that puzzled and charmed Peter. Who in the world were they, these Devonshers? Anglo-Saxon kin, gone to seed? No, not gone to seed. Gone amuck. What had happened? Was pioneering alone responsible? If old Carter Devonsher had remained in England would the weak strain have appeared? What weak strain? Bah! What idiocy was this! The world was going to pieces. Why waste himself trying to discover one more contributing cause?

And yet, with the old agony in his wounded leg mounting until it sent shooting pains along his jaw to his chin, he rode steadily after the tall swaying figure on Shawnee, of the Arab strain.

Just before the sun sank behind a flat-topped peak, Sid permitted his posse and prisoner to halt beside a rivulet in a narrow valley whose north end seemed blocked by a saw-topped range.

"We'll rest here for supper and wait for moon-up," he said. "Eve, have I your promise not to give me the slip, or have I got to watch you every minute?"

"I'm going back with you, Sid." Eve's

voice was unexpectedly gentle. "I'm sorry I was rude to you back there, but——"

"It's all right, Eve!" The sheriff interrupted eagerly. "I don't blame you for feeling nervous. Well, I'm glad you're giving me your word. Ain't any other woman in the Basin I'd expect to keep it. Now you stretch your legs. Us men'll do the cooking. You're company, on this trip."

Eve laughed. "An honored guest, eh, Sid? Well, don't let Willy Jones make the coffee, then. If his legal knowledge were on a par with his coffee—Heaven help the criminals of Antelope County!"

"Now look here, Eve," protested the judge, slipping an ax from its saddle sheath. "I don't see why you should find it necessary to insult me so's to make up to Sid Brownell. And anyhow, the major made the slum-gullion you drank at noon."

"I suppose that's the way you coerce your Tommies, major," said Eve. "Give 'em their choice of drinking your coffee or going over the top!" She laughed and waved Peter away as he would have helped her pull the saddle off Shawnee.

"Oh! If it were tea, I could manage," returned Peter. "But you Americans like your coffee like your whisky, neat. However, if we are not permitted to cook——"

"You can take care of the horses," interrupted the judge. "It ain't dignified for the court to do horse-wrangling, even if it does fry antelope steaks. By the way that's what you are under arrest for, Eve. Shooting an antelope, poor gentle thing, out of season. An old-timer like you should at least have kept the carcass in a gunny-sack."

"No, that ain't what she's arrested for," Sid broke in deliberately. "You can't try a person for but one crime at a time. And I don't care if she'd had ten antelope in her camp. I wouldn't have taken her up for that, at this time."

"I don't seem to care much about the turn the conversation has taken," murmured Eve. "Major, let's take these critters over yonder to that wild rye."

She led the way a short distance from the camp where a patch of green glowed purple in the sunset. "What are they going to do with me?" she asked the major when they were out of earshot of the other two.

"I don't know," replied Peter. "I'm not conversant with American procedure in such matters."

"YOU should have observed by now"—Eve's voice was impatient—"that Antelope Basin is legally without form and void. Willy Jones, Sid Brownell and Henry Worth! There will be no procedure! I thought perhaps they'd told you exactly what they were arresting me for."

"They're a curious pair," said Peter, evasively. "From a legal point of view, I suppose this is as idiotic a performance as one ever will witness; and yet——"

"And yet, don't be deceived!" exclaimed Eve. "Willy Jones has been returned as district judge for nearly twenty-five years. His reputation is that he acts without fear or favor, that on the bench he is without bowels of compassion. As much as he can be fond of anybody, the judge is fond of me; yet he would have pursued me for ten years if he believed I should be brought to justice. As for Sid—hah!" Eve laughed mirthlessly.

Peter limped beside her, his tired eyes never leaving her face. "Yes, as for Sid?" he repeated.

She looked up at him. "I'm not so sure about Sid. He's making a superhuman effort. But you see, the Brownells always have done the dirty work for the Devonshers."

Peter's lips tightened. "Which means just what?"

Eve shrugged her shoulders. "That life's a mess!" They were returning to the camp and she paused before they should come within hearing of the two men at work over the fire. "Major Colbaith, why did you return to the Antelope Basin country?"

"I told myself that it was because the Arab strain in your horses tempted me beyond my strength."

"Do you always tell yourself the whole truth?"

"Quite infrequently!"

Eve smiled. Her gray eyes were black in the afterglow. Then she said seriously: "I wish you'd give up that Arab strain. After all, it was bred to Indian ponies. And you can't put final trust in a mixed breed of that kind."

"I had an idea," returned Peter, "that I'd located a thoroughbred that had merely been badly broken. Under a great strain such a thoroughbred will sometimes run true to form. I'm eager to watch this thoroughbred under such a test."

"What is running true to form?" demanded Eve.

"Sort of a noblesse oblige, I think." Peter's scarred hand was tense against his hip but his voice was casual.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" Eve's voice was suddenly passionate. "You don't know the Devonshers. They look like pure-breds. But they've got a streak of mongrel in them."

"I don't believe it," said Peter, coolly. "I'm going to wait and see."

"I want you to go away. Go away and never come back. You are only adding to my torture."

There was silence during which a coyote barked far down the valley. Then Peter said gently: "If it's that, I'll go, of course. You are going to need a friend. I had hoped you'd let me be that friend. And when I speak so, I fully realize that there must be many people who care for you and who will want to help."

"Why do you waste time saying that sort of thing? You were in the Basin country for a month. You saw how they all turned against me the moment I tried to do the decent thing and make them do it too. There's a curse on us Devonshers."

"Why is there?" Peter spoke without his drawl.

Eve looked him fully and frankly in the eyes. "I don't know." She stared at him as if she never before had seen him. "After all," she murmured, "you are a stranger and you'll be gone and forget it in a short time. Why should I worry?"

"Yes." Peter's smile was curious. "I must get back to the pleasures of war. Why not permit me to distract my mind by watching a real fight for the little space remaining to me?"

"You are very tired. Come over by the fire and rest," said Eve abruptly, and Peter, with a sigh that might have been either of relief or of sympathy, followed her.

Supper was a silent affair. When it was finished, Eve withdrew beyond the glow of the fire, wrapped her blanket about her and lay down with her head on her saddle. It was an hour before the glow which heralded the moon outlined the eastern peaks. During all that hour, Eve stared at the Milky Way as if in its fathomless iridescence she hoped to find answer to the question that tortured her.

When the moon sailed free of the ranges Sid rose, relighted his pipe and said, "Saddle all!"

By the time the valley was fully flooded with light, the little horse train was moving at a jog trot along the edge of the rivulet. Sid worked them mercilessly that night. Peter could think of no reason for so long a forced march unless the sheriff was afraid that his resolution would fail him if he dallied on the way.

The going was, however, largely downgrade and infinitely easier than the out trip had been. At dawn, they pushed round the north shoulder of old Gray Bull and at sunup they were trotting through the cemetery, past a new-made grave at which Eve did not so much as glance.

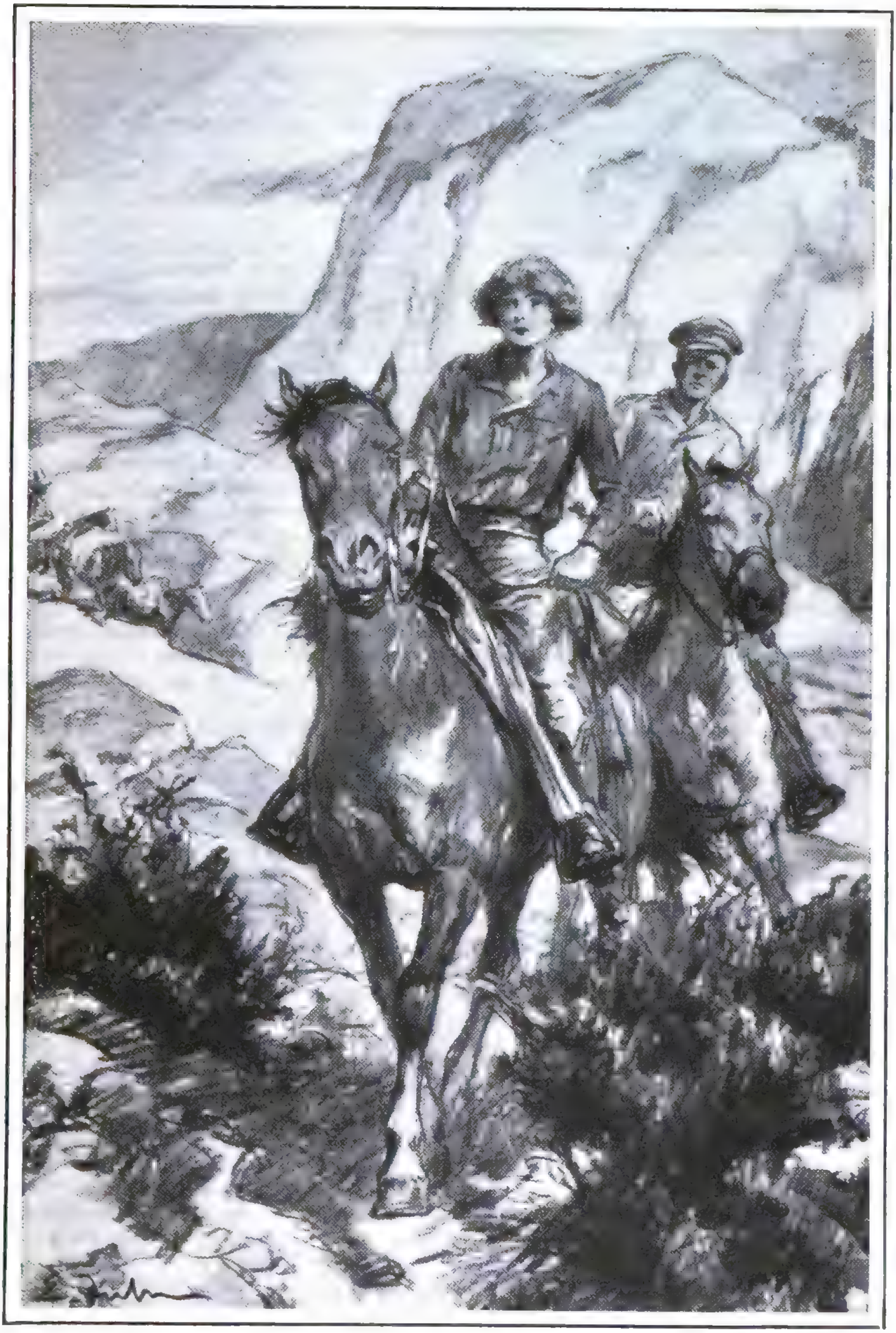
THE little town, with its low, gay-roofed houses snuggled about the plaza, looked very peaceful in the early light. So early indeed that only the tavern chimney showed smoke. But it was not to the tavern that Sid led the way. Instead he swung to the right, after leaving the cemetery, along the trail that led to the south edge of the plaza where the county courthouse and jail lay multicolored and menacing. Before the broad door of the jail, he drew up and dismounted. Eve's lips curled but she did not speak.

It was the judge who protested. "Don't be entirely loco, Sid! Take Eve over to her mother."

The sheriff stood at the door, his face distorted by unwonted anger and resolution.

"I ain't going to do anything of the sort. Angus Duncan was shot. We've got reason to believe Eve did the shooting. If it was any one else we suspected I'd bring 'em in and lock 'em up. It was my own daughter's husband was murdered and for once, by God, the Brownells are going to do justice to the Devonshers. I don't care what kind of threat or talk or promise Eve puts up. She's going into a cell. Eve, you get off that horse, and come in."

"'Light, stranger, and look to your saddle,'" said Eve, derisively, without stirring.



She had a distinction, in spite of her obvious weariness, that puzzled and charmed Peter. Who in the world were they, these Devonshers? Anglo-Saxon kin gone to seed?

"Sid, you're making a fool of yourself," declared the judge.

"That's all right! The 'server of Devonshers' serves a warrant this time. We'll see!"

"She's not going into the jail till she has to," snorted the judge. "I'm allowing her out on bail, this minute. Major, got any money?"

"I can go on Miss Devonsher's bail, if that's what you wish," said Peter.

"It's what I wish," agreed Judge Jones. "For a Britisher you are remarkably intelligent. Eve, you go on over to your mother. I'll arrange this detail."

"Well, Minnie and no one else can't say I didn't try to do my full duty," muttered Sid, relief and anger struggling in his face.

EVE did not stir. She looked at Peter. "Of course you will not humiliate me by doing anything of the sort, Major Colbaith! Both Sid and Willy Jones are silly. They know they'd never get me into jail alive. And they know there is no need of bail. I'll be at the tavern whenever I'm wanted."

She touched Shawnee lightly with the spurs and trotted slowly toward the tavern. There was extraordinary beauty in the June morning. The cottonwoods at the edge of the plaza were silver filigree against the many gay tints of the low-built dwellings. Rainbow filaments of clouds wove gently in and out among the mountain crests that were as familiar to Eve as the fingers of her long brown hands. The new-turned furrows of the plaza were a rich burnt-orange; the morning sky, a delicate azure. Eve stared with sudden attention at the preparation for "war gardening" the plaza. It never had been under the plow but the soil should prove rich, for it had been a corral for the many years that it was a part of the Devonsher ranch. She saw Mrs. Brownell open the door of Sid's Garage, which was directly across the plaza from the tavern. Shawnee started as if he had felt the spur, but Eve held him to his regular long trot and brought him up before the tavern without seeming to hear Mrs. Brownell's shrill call to Minnie.

The tavern corral gate was close beside the north end of the house. Eve opened the gate and led Shawnee in. She unsaddled him and swung the saddle over the rack by the alfalfa stack; then she gave him a thorough cleaning and currying, Shawnee groaning with the luxury of it as she proceeded. When he shone like satin she laid her cheek against his for a moment, then slowly went into the house. Not through the kitchen, where the Chinaman was preparing breakfast, but through the front door into the great empty living-room.

She pulled off her spurs and hung them on a nail beside the outer door. They swung jingling and as if the gentle sound were a known signal, Mary Devonsher appeared, white-faced, in the door of her room.

Eve stood perfectly still. But Mary, whatever might be her faults of coldness or of aloofness, was always all mother as far as Eve was concerned.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Eve! Eve! My little girl!"

She rushed across the room and Eve wrapped her strong arms about Mary's frail body. Standing thus, she looked like a tall young lover bending above his mistress. After a moment Mary stood back and looked up into Eve's face.

"You are very tired, Eve. Not France? What happened?" There was a look of terrible anxiety in Mary's worn face as she shot these questions at her daughter.

"Mother," said Eve, slowly, "I seem to have got myself into a snarl. I've been thinking. I'm going to keep my own counsel about all this. I shall not talk even to you. Can you trust me that much?"

Mary Devonsher looked up into Eve's face. It was Dave Devonsher's face, high-colored, passionate; yet it had, too, Mary's own look of race, something chaste, something of dignity, too subtle for description. Mary never had pretended to understand Eve any more than she had David. Yet she had always trusted Eve as she never had trusted David. This though she had loved him passionately.

The look of anxiety increased. "I can trust you, Eve. That is not the question. It's whether or not I can endure the terrible anxiety. It's killing me."

"Mother! Mother! There is a curse on me! I can't bear to have you look so. I've done nothing that shouldn't have been done. Don't look so! After all these years of Devonshers haven't you got hardened to crises?"

"If you've done nothing that you shouldn't do, I can endure it. You've been on one of your hunting trips, I suppose, instead of going to France?"

Eve nodded.

Her mother went on as if she could not keep the question back. "Did you hunt with the .44 or did you stick to the .25-.20?"

"I used both. But I lost the .44 somewhere in the creek a few days ago. I guess I'd better go get a bath before breakfast."

"Get your bath and go to bed. I'll bring your breakfast to you. Eve, if you'd been a boy, I could understand you."

Eve laughed. "If I'd been a boy, I could have understood myself!"

After her bath, she ate her breakfast and slept for a few hours. Then she rose and dressed herself slowly and wearily. She abandoned the riding clothes for a dull green linen frock, one of her school-teaching dresses. When she entered the living-room it was noon and the Chinaman was setting the table. Peter stood by a window staring across the plaza.

"Hello, major!" cried Eve. "What branch of the law do you represent?"

Peter turned quickly. "You do look fit!" he exclaimed. "As if you'd slept!"

"I have. I hope you followed my example."

Peter shook his head. "A bath was enough for me. Miss Devonsher, you must employ a—what do you call them over here?—a lawyer. It's perfectly extraordinary, but Jones is really going ahead as if you had been duly accused of—of shooting that Duncan person and were ready for trial."

Eve's cheeks blanched but she nodded coolly. "Willy Jones doesn't have to do anything 'duly' here. He's a law unto himself as well as to the rest of us." She looked out of the open door where men were harrowing the plaza. "It doesn't seem real. I can't make it seem so. Any more than I can look at you and realize that you've gone across No Man's Land. And yet—here I am, Eve Devonsher, accused of murder. Isn't it unbelievable!"

"Yes," agreed Peter, "it is. Murder and—er—horse-running, they call it, I believe. Extraordinary! The fools!"

Eve sat down at the dining-table and rested her chin on her palm. "Don't women get arrested in England? Didn't you ever know a so-called lady to get mixed up in a murder affair?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, a certain Countess who was a friend of mine was tried for murder. But that was quite different. A nasty love affair that had inevitably to end in such a manner. You know, with you, it's quite impossible for me to establish a motive."

"Motive!" Eve laughed drearily. "Wait till the trial! You'll discover that I had many. There will be more than a sufficient number to convince you that I've been a potential horse thief and murderer since babyhood. I might as well plead guilty and end it all."

PETER limped from the window to seat himself across the table from Eve. "You'll do nothing of the sort, Miss Devonsher. You will fight, fight, fight! You'll fight the whole beastly pack and defeat them."

Eve lifted her head and looked Peter squarely in the eye. "Major Colbaith, do you think I killed Angus Duncan?"

"I don't think you killed Angus Duncan and still less do I think you ran horses. One is as preposterous to my mind as the other." He laughed suddenly. "By Jove, if they have to find you guilty of either, I'd prefer it to be murder. The other is contemptible. No, your probability of guilt is too improbable! What I'm keen about, is that you clean the silly matter up with all possible speed so that you may go to France and get a normal view of the life here at Antelope Basin."

For a long time there was no sound in the room. Eve continued to eye Peter until, as if no longer able to endure her thoughts in silence, she gasped: "This too! This too! Now I know I shall go mad!"

Startled, Peter half rose from his chair; but before he could speak Judge Jones ambled in at the open door and Mary Devonsher and the Chinaman appeared from the kitchen.

"Ah, Willy Jones!" exclaimed Eve. "Did you bring handcuffs with you?"

"There's a pair of 'em over in my office now," returned the judge. "I'd like you to go back with me after dinner and take a look at them."

Eve nodded.

Mary Devonsher spoke quickly. "I shall go with you, Eve."

"Not this time, Mary," said Judge Jones. "I want to see Eve alone. I'll bring her back to you in an hour or so. Don't worry."

"Don't worry! Don't you talk like a fool, Willy Jones!" snapped Eve's mother. "I suppose you and Sid Brownell look on yourselves as fit to command the Allies after leading such a wonderful expedition up back of old Gray Bull."

"Well, hardly, Mary, hardly. Too many prunes in my diet for that much effort. Fourth time we've had 'em since we brought Angus down, Mary. Really annoys me."

"I hope it does!" returned Eve's mother, shortly.

Eve chuckled. "With mother and the major for me, I don't so much mind your being against me, Willy Jones!"

The judge turned his one eye upon her, a little smile of admiration lighting his sallow face. "I'm not against you, Eve!"

"Are you for me, judge?" asked Eve with sudden seriousness.

"I'm the law," he replied briefly, and returned to his meal, which was finished in silence.

WHEN the judge had completed the careful manicuring of his teeth with a quill toothpick, he pulled his Stetson hat well over his eye, lighted his pipe, turned up afresh the cuffs of his denim trousers and nodded at Eve. She followed him slowly out of the door, with a glance back at her mother and Peter, her eyes brilliant, her lips sweet.

Most of Antelope Basin was out at the moment, inspecting the work on the plaza. Every one stared at Eve with eager curiosity. Every one greeted her by voice. No one came near her. Although apparently as free as air, walking thus with Judge Jones, it was as if both her wrists were handcuffed. Here where she had lived all her life, where she had given so utterly of herself to her friends, she suddenly felt that she had no friends. In spite of the fact that she now wore a frock instead of the riding breeches, there was something boyish in the arrogance with which she held her head with its waving mop of bronze and red. Henry Worth was standing in the door of the saloon smoking a cigarette. He and Eve did not greet each other but the judge said, as they strode by:

"Be over at my office in half an hour or so, Henry."

Henry nodded. Eve's chin lifted a trifle and she quickened the pace.

"You always were like a giraffe, Eve," protested the judge. "They say that when they want to hurry, they just lengthen their step instead of taking more of them. I don't see why you should show feeling in passing Henry's place."

"Don't you?" returned Eve. "As chief Pandora of this valley I don't see how the knowledge has escaped you."

"Eve"—the judge turned a very intelligent eye upon her—"I suppose you're very busy hating me, just now."

"No, I'm not." Eve returned his look with equal intelligence. "I'm so busy hating myself, I'm indifferent to everybody else—but my mother."

"So you hate yourself! I wonder why."

"For being a Devonsher."

They had reached the courthouse now. This was built of logs and roofed with sod from which bluegrass and poppies waved wantonly. The judge unlocked the door which led directly into a room about thirty feet square. The walls were of carefully chinked logs, that once had been whitewashed but were now pepper and salt in effect. A large, fly-specked map of Wyoming hung in the wall space between two windows that gave on the plaza. The two remaining windows in the room faced south and framed a clear view of the flanks of Gray Bull and the cemetery. At the east end of the room were two doors. One was barred and led into the jail. The other was open and led into an adobe lean-to, which the judge and the sheriff shared as an office. Between the doors hung a time-stained American flag.

The judge led the way across the courtroom, into his office. This was a small room, with a single window looking out on the plaza. The walls were bare. In the middle of the room was a table, littered with pipes, spurs, tobacco cans and papers. There were twelve chairs pushed back against the walls. Judge Jones motioned Eve to one of these, then sat down himself at the desk.

"Well, Eve, we'd better get busy and clear things up, one way or another. As near as I can make out, a majority of the folks in the town think you shot Angus Duncan and got away with his stallion and two mares, besides some twenty-five good horses belonging to other ranchers. You left behind you, when you started for France, a lot of bitter feeling. I thought it was better to bring you in, if you actually hadn't gone to France, and have you face the folks before rumor and suspicion and further horse-stealings had turned 'em ugly. Somehow, I don't feel as if a Devonsher would have much show around here if there wasn't some one to keep justice alive."

EVE crossed her knees nonchalantly but there was nothing nonchalant in the set of her lips. "What made you think I hadn't gone to France, judge?"

The old man stared out over the plaza, evidently measuring his words. Finally he said carefully: "You will remember that I know you pretty well. Your first instinct when anything troubles you is to return to the trail. When you made that speech at the Red Cross meeting the day you left so suddenly, for France, I knew that something more than ordinary patriotism had stirred you up. And when Minnie Brownell got up and reminded you that as the daughter of a horse thief you had no business to set yourself up as moral standard-bearer of Antelope Basin, I knew they'd got you where you lived and that you'd go Piute as sure as your name was Devonsher. I worked it out that while you would go to France eventually because you were so honestly heated up over the war, that you would go into the woods first—you couldn't help it."

Eve's eyes were full of blue flame. She leaned forward in her chair. "I was stirred by more than ordinary patriotism. I'd just discovered that Howard Freeman was a coyote."

"Pshaw!" The judge paused as he started to light his pipe. "You were a darn fool even to engage yourself to Howard. A woman of your type tied up to a schoolmaster! Nobody knew better than you that it wouldn't work."

"I was honestly in love with him," said Eve, with something husky in her voice that caused the judge's eye to squint in a puzzled manner. "It hurt me, it humiliated me in a way you couldn't understand, to have him sneak out of going to war. The quitter!"

"Yes, but it wouldn't have hurt and humiliated you that much if the Englishman hadn't been here at the time. You fell for the Britisher hard, Eve."

"Better leave that alone, Willy Jones!" Eve's voice had an edge and her face flamed with anger.

"Listen, Eve! You are going through hell in the next few weeks. Nothing that any one can rake up is going to be too private to be told for or against you. Eve, you've got to get your temper under absolute control or nothing can save you."

Eve rose to her full height. "And let me warn you, Willy Jones, that when I've had enough, I shall quit."

"No, you won't," replied Judge Jones. "Your friend the major is going to be sticking round here and you are going to show him you are a sport, if you go to the penitentiary for it. I saw that after the way he handled you yesterday. Sit down, Eve. Henry and Sid will be here shortly and I want to settle a few things before they come."

"What are they going to do here?" demanded Eve, dropping slowly back into her chair.

"I'm going over evidence with them and if I think what they say warrants it, I shall hold you for trial."

"Willy Jones, you take too much power into your hands!" cried Eve, tragically.

"It's better so," nodded Jones. "I'm a good dictator, and a just judge, though I'm a nondescript lawyer. Here come Henry and Sid. Well, I'll have plenty of time to settle the other things, later."

Sid came in, breathlessly. He had been doing his bit on the plaza war garden and his boots were coated with orange dust. Sweat streamed over his great cheeks. He tossed his broad-brimmed hat onto the desk and mopped his face with a red handkerchief. Henry, cool and clean, nodded at the judge, seated himself opposite Eve, pushing his Stetson to the back of his head as he did so.

"Might put your hat under your chair, Henry," suggested Judge Jones. "There's a lady present and, moreover, you are in the judge's chamber. Sit down, Sid."

Henry, without a change of expression, took the suggestion while the sheriff eased himself into a tight-fitting wooden armchair.

"Sid, tell me what you know about this shooting," said the judge.

The sheriff, addressing Eve, told the story of Minnie's telephone call, of his and Henry's trip to the pasture, of the bringing of the body to the Duncan ranch house. He did not forget even to describe the stalling of the car in Devonsher's Creek. Judge Jones permitted him to reach the point where Doc Peabody had pronounced Angus dead. Then he said abruptly:

"Henry, you obviously suspected Eve from the first. Why?"

Henry answered frankly, still avoiding Eve's gaze. "There wasn't anybody but Eve and the Englishman much interested in thoroughbreds. Everybody else that might want to run horses of that kind I could account for. Eve said when she went crazy at that Red Cross meeting that Antelope Basin had got to help pay the Allies for what they were doing for America, and that if she couldn't get us to do it voluntarily she'd make us do it another way. I knew right along she hadn't gone to France because Johnny Miller was dead drunk at my place the night she left and I brought him home. He was celebrating, having moved up to the Antelope Peak ranch, and his wife telephoned and gave me the devil and told me I'd got to bring him back. I felt like it was up to me and I got him up to her about two o'clock in the morning. Then I started along the Antelope Peak trail, south toward the Reserve, thinking I'd get me an antelope. At dawn, I hid above the springs to watch for a shot when Eve comes up riding Pawnee and all outfitted for a long camping trip. She watered Pawnee and the pack horse, then she hits the trail south into the Forest Reserve."

"Hah!" snorted Judge Jones. "Why wasn't this brought out in the inquest?"

"Well, you see, I told Mary Devonsher and she got me to promise not to tell."

"Mary!" Judge Jones eyed Henry thoughtfully. "Sid, there goes Doc Peabody toward Henry's Place. Go to the door and yell at him."

SID extricated himself from his chair, waddled to the door and yelled. At the sound, Henry lifted his head and his nostrils dilated. For Sid's wonderful throat gave forth the old Sioux war cry that seventy-five years before had been the call of the Oregon Trail. It still was in common use in the Antelope Basin country —common enough at least so that Henry should not have been so visibly moved; although it is true that the cry uttered by Sid became a thing of such tragic and threatening beauty that no one of pioneer traditions could hear it without a quickening pulse.

Sid repeated the call. Henry rose and looked from Judge Jones to the open windows like a hunted animal. Eve and the judge watched him curiously.

"What's the matter, Henry?" asked the judge.

"Sid's voice always upsets me," muttered Henry, sinking shamefacedly into his seat as the sheriff turned back into the room.

"Doc's coming," said Sid.

Peabody, in the perpetual worn brown corduroy suit, with the perpetual look of weariness in the gray eyes above the close-cropped physician's beard, stepped lightly over the doorstep and took a chair beside Sid.

"Hello, Eve," he said, quietly.

Eve nodded and a wistful smile lighted her face for a moment. Doc Peabody had ushered her into the world and she loved him; not, Heaven knows, for that! but because he was simple and sweet and kind: rare qualities in a man in this pioneer country, where men still looked on such characteristics in the male as effeminate.

"Doc," said Judge Jones, "could Eve have shot Angus Duncan?"

Doc Peabody gave Eve a long, full look, then gazed out of the window across the plaza to the tavern. After what seemed an eternity to Eve he said, "Willy, I don't think you ought to ask me a question like that."

"Don't try to be legal, Doc!" protested the judge.

"I don't know anything about law. But my profession makes me know a whole lot about human beings. Practically all I know I have got like a priest gets and I can't use it. I'm not going to answer that question, Willy. I am going to say, though, that I think you'd better let Angus lie in his grave and send Eve Devonsher on to France. You can rest easy then that justice has been done."

Judge Jones grunted enigmatically. "Doc, do you know any facts about this case that would tend to incriminate Eve?"

The little doctor scowled. Eve suddenly laughed mirthlessly. "You can't shunt Willy Jones off the scent, Doc. Don't try. You'll waste time, for he'll just pick it up farther on. If you know any facts, give them up. Willy Jones probably has a legal weapon that will force you to, anyhow."

"I don't know any facts about the shooting that weren't brought out at the inquest," declared the little doctor.

"When did you know Angus had bought the Princess horse?" asked Judge Jones, suddenly.

"Soon after Mary Devonsher had consented to the sale. She had a fainting spell and the Chinaman called me in. He said Angus had been rowing Mary very quietly for several days. He didn't know what about. When Mary came out of her faint she began to cry and said that if Eve knew she'd sold the Princess horse, she'd kill Angus. She was hysterical and I don't think that should be used as evidence. But the Chinaman heard her and you'd better get it straight from me rather than garbled from him. That positively is all I can tell you that would seem to deal with the shooting—though I want to add one thing. Have you questioned Henry about the .44?"

"Yes," answered the judge. "What there is to that will come out at the trial."

"Then I've nothing more to contribute," said Doc Peabody. "I was on the way up to Miller's to see Annie Miller's baby. You'd better let me move along, Willy."

"On the way, via four fingers of Scotch, eh?" grinned Judge Jones.

Doc rumpled his beard reflectively. "Life isn't fair to women-folks," he said irrelevantly. He rose, gave Eve another long look and went out.

There was silence in the judge's chambers. Judge Jones sat rubbing the sparse whiskers on his chin, biting his lip and eying Eve. Eve, white of face, stared at the judge with a growing look of horror in her fine blue eyes. It seemed an eternity before the judge said:

"Eve, you will have to stand trial for stealing some twenty-odd horses and for shooting Angus Duncan."

"But, judge! Judge! I didn't shoot Angus Duncan. I didn't do it!" Eve jumped to her feet, her face working.

None of the three men moved or spoke. Eve ignored the other two. "Don't you believe me, Willy Jones?"

"I'm the law. I have no beliefs. There is enough evidence, to my mind, to make it right that you should be forced to prove your innocence, and, on the other hand, it's up to Sid to prove your guilt. Sid being the people, in this case. I'm fond of you, Eve, awful fond of you. But I think it would be a healthy thing for this community to have a lot of matters aired and cleaned up as a trial like this will do."

"Prove my innocence!" cried Eve. "How can I prove my innocence with you all against me?"

"I am not against you!" shouted Judge Jones, pounding on the desk. "And there will be twelve men and women in the jury box not against you."

Eve set her jaw and took a turn or two up and down the room. When she paused before the judge's desk her voice and manner were calm.

"What happens next, Willy Jones?"

"I suppose I've got to lock you up." Sid spoke heavily.

THE judge turned on him with more ferocity than Sid's feeble suggestion would seem to warrant. "If you talk about locking Eve up again till I tell you to, I'll take your sheriff's badge away from you. You two fellows are excused." The judge's roar could be heard across the plaza, as was testified to by the attentive heads lifted from the harrows. Henry and Sid beat a hasty retreat. Judge Jones turned to Eve.

"Whom are you going to get to represent you? The only two lawyers in Antelope County, one of 'em being District Attorney, are gone to training camp. That makes it bad for both sides. Sid wants to have old Colonel Johnson from Plaza Junction for the state. Why don't you get hold of Jim Poindexter to represent you?"

"He's too high-priced, for one thing," replied Eve, drearily, "and he probably wouldn't do it for another."

"But would you like to have him?"

"Would I like to have him? He's the best lawyer in the state. He was a friend of my father's. Don't ask foolish questions, judge!"

"Then I'll send him to you," said Willy Jones, with a satisfied nod. "We'll then have the two best men in the state of Wyoming handling the matter. Both sides have every chance I can give them. And"—he hesitated—"God help you, Eve!"

"God!" exclaimed Eve. "Who is God? As far as I can see, you are God in Antelope Basin."

"I wish I were for about fifteen minutes," retorted Judge Jones, grimly. "I'm going back to the tavern with you, Eve. I'll ask you not to leave the house without my permission." He lifted a keen eye at Eve.

"I agree, for a few days, anyhow." Eve's smile was twisted and boyish.

"That's all I want, just now." Judge Jones nodded in a satisfied way, lighted his pipe and motioned Eve toward the door.

When they reached the tavern, the judge did not enter. "I've got business to tend to," he said. "Jim Poindexter most likely will be here to see you tomorrow or next day. In the meantime, keep your head, Eve."

She stood framed in the doorway, tall, thin, chin up, cheeks burning, eyes wide and full of blue light.

"Life is not fair to me, Willy Jones. But I'll keep my head, such as it is."

Judge Jones pulled his hat off. "I'd give my right hand to be ten years younger, Eve Devonsher," he said in a low voice.

Eve gave a short laugh that was not pleasant. "Even ten years ago, Willy Jones, you were only the law!"

"Perhaps! But I'm ten years wiser now, Eve. That's where my own little private hell comes in."

"But, in the meantime, you achieve the impartial viewpoint," said Eve. "No one can doubt that! Least of all, I."

"True!" returned the judge, and he turned back toward the courthouse.

Peter, with Mary Devonsher, was standing by the south window of the living-room. Eve came slowly toward them.

"It's very real trouble, of the true Devonsher variety," she said slowly.

Peter pulled an armchair toward the window. "Sit down," he said, "and if you'd rather not talk about it, don't."

Eve perched tensely on an arm of the chair. "I can't very well talk about anything else, can I? I've been—what do you call it?—held for the murder of Angus Duncan."

Mary gave a little scream and her hand clutched at her throat. "I'm not going to faint," she protested as Peter caught her arm. "I can at least be as brave as Eve," she added pitifully as she sank into a chair opposite Eve.

EVE dropped to one knee beside her mother. The sun flooded through the west window, making a glory of her hair. Her voice was utterly tender. "Mother! Mother! What have we Devonshers done to you to make you look like that! Dearest, I know you believe I shot Angus, but I didn't. Can't you believe me?"

"I don't care whether you shot him or not! He deserved to be shot. All I care about is you, in this terrible trouble!" Mary looked up at Peter, who was standing with his scarred hand clutching at his chin, his eyes inscrutable. "Major Colbaith, she is really a wonderful person. And she's tried to bring the Devonsher name back—so hard. She's the one that got the community school in here, and she taught school for nothing till the town woke up. And she got the Red Cross here and she got the best of the boys to volunteer, and she——"

Eve interrupted. "Mother, have you been sleeping lately?"

Mary gave a little sob. "No, Eve! How could I?"

"I supposed you thought I was in France. Oh, mother! Mother!"

Eve laid her forehead on her mother's knee and Mary bowed her own head above her daughter's hair. The clock ticked slowly. Peter breathed heavily but did not stir. After a moment, Eve looked up.

"Mother, Jim Poindexter is going to handle my case for me. Judge Jones will see to it that I have an absolutely fair show. I am not guilty—on either count. They can't convict me. And as the judge says, it will clear the Basin of hate to have this trial."

"Nothing but an earthquake could clear Antelope Basin of hate," Mary said brokenly. "I'm afraid for you! Afraid!"

"I'm not afraid," insisted Eve. "Let 'em bring on their hates." Then she gave Peter a quick glance that was like a war call and thrilled him as though a bugle had sounded in his ear. "It will be a gorgeous fight!" she exclaimed. "Jim Poindexter and I against the world!"

"Jim Poindexter, whoever he may be, you and I against the world," drawled Peter. "I like a bit of a fight myself. And I imagine that there is more in this than meets even the judge's canny eye."

"But you must leave any moment," said Eve, quickly. "And, after all——"

"And after all, I'm an outlander, I suppose," interrupted Peter. "But I'm not. I'm a kinsman. Anglo-Saxon to Anglo-Saxon, or something like that, you know. And I'm going to confess that this leg of mine must have six weeks' rest. I think Dr. Peabody can take care of it as well as the chap up in Cheyenne. So that's that."

Eve turned back to her mother, her color still brilliant. "So you see, mother! It's not so bad! One has friends, after all! You and the major and Jim Poindexter! Why, I'm rich!"

"And one may include the judge, I think," added Peter.

"No!" exclaimed Eve and her mother together, and Eve went on: "Don't be deceived by his liking for me. He'd hang his own daughter if he thought it justice."

"I don't believe it," declared Peter, stoutly.

"You'll see." Eve's voice was grim; then she turned to her mother and again was tender. "Now, mother, I'm going to ease my nerves by talking to Major Colbaith, and you are going to take some of that sedative powder Doc Peabody left for you and go to bed."

Mary looked at Peter. "Will you sit with her this evening, major?"

"I shall be most happy to do so," replied Peter.

Eve rose and pulled her mother gently to her feet. "Come, dear. A glass of hot milk and a long sleep for that tired heart."

Mary followed docilely to her bedroom. Eve went to the kitchen for the milk and then tucked her mother into the wide mahogany bed that had been brought round the Horn from England by old Carter Devonsher. Eve thought of this as something that might interest Peter. When the sedative had closed her mother's tired eyes she crossed the living-room to stand beside the battered chest of drawers that had always been used as a serving-table.

"LOOK!" she said to Peter, who limped across the room to join her. "Speaking of kinship, my grandfather brought this and mother's bed and my old cradle in the storeroom around the Horn to Vancouver, from Vancouver to Fort Jason, from Fort Jason here. They have the wandering foot, the English."

"I have noticed your mother's bed when she's left her door open," Peter nodded. "I was born in just such a huge affair, in the old place in England. The two beds might easily have been made by the same man." He passed his scarred hand over the mellow front of the chest of drawers, then drawled, "I wonder why you all hate the people you left behind."

"But we don't!" protested Eve, sinking into a chair by the open window. "How can we? We don't even know who they were."

"The descendants of the people you left are in the trenches of France now. I'm one of them. What's happened? Why should it be so?"

"I don't hate the British," Eve began—then hesitated. "At least, I'm not—well, I'm only hostile to them."

"Why?" repeated the major laconically.

"I don't know." Eve's voice was thoughtful. "Because my father was hostile to them, I guess—" She broke off abruptly and bit her lips. "I feel as if I were suffocating!" She lifted her eyes a little wildly to the window which framed the flanks of Gray Bull and the cemetery beneath, where a yellow spot marked the new-made grave.

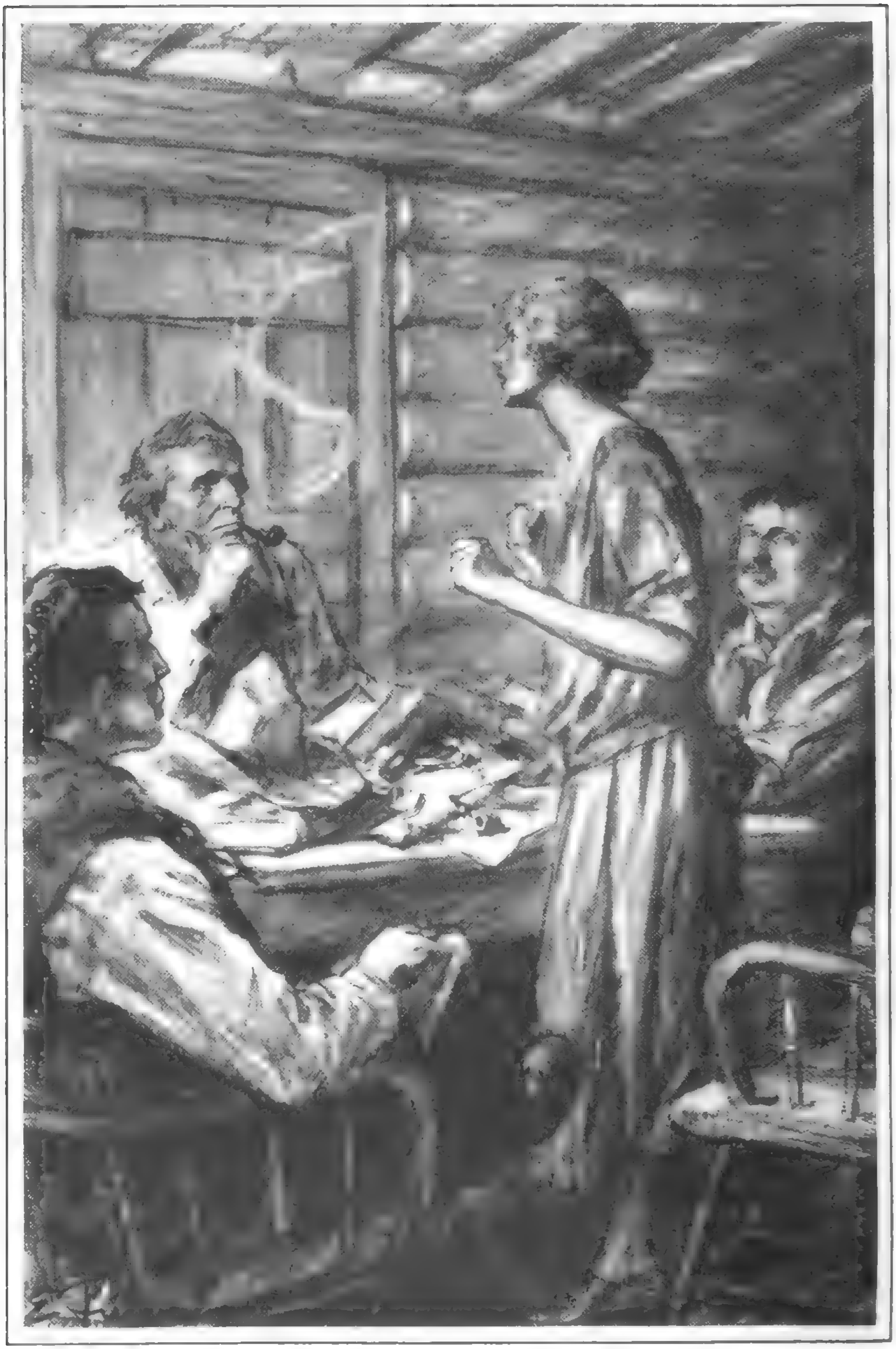
"I know!" Peter's drawl was infinitely sympathetic. "But you'll stand up better tomorrow if you can talk of other things today. Will you tell me a little about your father?"

Eve turned slowly to look at Peter as though she were measuring him anew.

"I'd like to tell some one about my father, if I thought that that some one could be fair. I'd like to feel as if some one in the world could feel about him as I do."

"Then you think you are fair about him?" asked Peter.

"Yes! But you see, I don't know what your standards are. Ours here in the Basin are—different."



"Eve, you will have to stand trial for stealing some twenty-odd horses and for shooting Angus Duncan." "But, judge! I didn't shoot Angus Duncan. . . . Don't you believe me?"

"I suppose that people of our race stock everywhere have about the same attitude toward the few essentials." Peter lighted his pipe. "Please, Miss Devonsher, tell me about your father. You'll not find me a stern judge, really."

"I look like my father," said Eve abruptly. "I get my height from the Devonshers—and my temperament. We should have arrived somewhere, grandfather, dad and I. But we didn't. We failed—because my grandfather failed. What caused his weakness, I don't know."

Eve leaned back in her chair and during the rest of the half hour during which she talked, her eyes scarcely left the Englishman's face, though she seemed to be speaking not so much to him as to that inner self that Peter had discovered was her closest companion. She spoke in a monotone, easily, without hesitating for a word, as if she were checking over a statement she had made to that inner self so often that she knew its every phrase by heart.

"Father was said to have had an ungovernable temper as a boy. But I knew him as the most self-controlled man in Antelope Basin. It was a tremendous sort of thing, that clamping down to silence of a passionate, unhappy nature. Even as a little child I used to watch him with awe, for I had the same sort of nature. And when he'd disappear for days at a time, I'd know exactly what he was doing. He'd gone into the plains, for more strength.

"I adored him.

"Mother loved him too, but she never understood him. She was the New England school teacher then as she is now. Bless her! I wonder what she really thought of father. I wonder if she knew how to give herself to him, body and soul, mind and heart. I think not. I think part of his extraordinary restlessness was due to the fact that he never really possessed the things he must have valued: free range, power, a woman, a son.

"Mother didn't want father to go to the Spanish-American War. It was hard for her to make him see how she felt. I'm the only one she can show her true self to. Father was too great a problem for her to let herself be relaxed with him. So she was tight-lipped about the Spanish-American War when she should have been tender and pleading. Father went as a Rough Rider. The only man from Antelope Basin. I'm glad he went. Glad!

"Father came back from Cuba, broken with fever. Mother nursed him and for a while he seemed happy. But we were very poor, and mother was working herself to death trying to make the hotel pay. But it looked as if we'd lose that, the last bit of property out of the enormous Devonsher holdings. Father just didn't seem to fit in anywhere. He certainly was no good as a landlord. He'd let go of his few head of blooded horses when he went to war, to try to tide mother through the time he was away. He used to pace up and down the living-room here, as he grew stronger, growing more silent as the family finances grew worse and mother worked harder and harder. Then one day he made up a pack outfit and rode away into the horse-ranch country south of us. It was many, many months before he came back. And this is the way he came.

"It was a June afternoon, clear and hot. A group of us boys and girls were playing at rope-throwing on the plaza. All of a sudden Angus Duncan dropped the spiral he was twirling and cried that he heard shooting. We all listened. There was the sound of gunfire up on Gray Bull Peak. Somehow, I had been tense ever since father had left home. We'd not had a letter from him though he had sent mother enough money to pay off the mortgage. But when I heard those shots, my heart skipped a beat and my throat pained me.

"You see the cedar forest, half-way up Gray Bull? Out from that a single figure rode on a white horse. A moment later came two other horsemen. They were shooting as they galloped after the lone rider. The lone rider kept turning in the saddle and returning the fire. They smashed down through the cemetery, down the trail to the plaza. The other children scattered, but I stood still, for it was my father riding the white horse.

"AS HE crossed the plaza I saw that he was bare-headed and his neckerchief was dripping blood. When he saw me, he pulled his horse to its haunches and smiled in a queer twisted way while he threw both arms above his head in surrender. 'Can't let 'em shoot my little red-headed maverick!' he said, as I ran up to him. 'Listen, Eve! I ran horses only from my own stock.'

"He reached down to take my hand and pitched forward with his face in the mane of the plunging white horse. Just as the two horsemen thundered up, he rolled out of his saddle. I caught the horse before it could bolt and Sid Brownell freed father's left foot from the stirrup and eased him to the ground. I let the white horse go then and gathered father's head in my arms, kneeling so as to lift his bloody shoulders into my lap.

"One of the two horsemen was a white man; the other was a half-breed. They both were dust-grimed, haggard and unshaved. They dismounted and stood over father and me. In a moment it seemed as if all of Antelope Basin were there too, everybody talking and swearing at once. Mother suddenly edged through the crowd. She stared at me and father; then her face worked and she said: 'Lay him down, Eve! He's dead.' Then she was tight-lipped again.

"People stopped talking and stared, and Sid Brownell and Doc Peabody and Willy Jones carried father in here and laid him on the lounge, there. He still wore that awful smile. After I saw them lay father down I ran out to the plaza with father's Colt in my hands, determined to shoot the men who had killed him. Angus Duncan was about my size then but very strong. He got the gun away from me and dragged me around to the corral, telling me not to make a fool of myself. Finally through the red haze in my brain I heard him say: 'Your father's been running horses in Utah. Those men have been racing him a straight hundred miles. He got what was coming to him.' Then I remembered what father himself had said to me—that he'd run horses only from his own stock. And I gave up and hid in the hay for shame.

"At first Antelope Basin said father couldn't have a funeral. They could have forgiven him if he'd shot a man in fair gun play, but they couldn't forgive his stealing horses. But mother went to Sid Brownell and told him he'd have to sing the Oregon Trail at the grave. Any one in Antelope Basin would go anywhere to hear Sid sing that. So there was a crowd in the cemetery and father had a funeral of sorts, after all.

"Nobody wept excepting young Henry Worth. He sobbed as usual all the time Sid was singing. Yet I know he hated my father. I had no tears myself. It all was like a suffocating nightmare to me, and after the funeral I ran away up into the cedars and didn't come back to the tavern until the next day.

"You see, I could have borne being branded as a horse thief's daughter if father could have died with an untwisted smile on his lips. Life owed him that much. But he did not die that way."

Eve stopped. Peter looked at the flanks of Gray Bull lying purple and serene in the late afternoon shadows. He saw the lone rider on the white horse emerging from the cedars. And after a moment's contemplation, he saw the funeral cortège of Angus Duncan winding up to the graveyard under the cedars. And then he saw Eve in the dawn light riding Shawnee down the trail through the graveyard to face her destiny before the courthouse door.

"You are blaming him!" exclaimed Eve.

"Not I!" Peter shook his head. "I'm trying to put together a picture puzzle with most of the parts missing."

"But you disapprove of him!" insisted Eve.

"You make it hard for me, Miss Devonsher. I don't like horse-stealing. It's a particularly nasty thing."

"I've worked that out, too!" cried Eve. "Twice in the early days when father had imported blooded stock the Utes ran off his breeders. He got one of the stallions back. Six of the finest mares he never did recover, nor three stallions. The only horses he ran were from the Utes and of the fine stock he himself had brought to Antelope Basin. Nobody would have thought so much of it here if the white man had not mixed in. He claimed that some of the horses were his. But if father said that he took only from Indians, it was so. He never lied. They were nothing but thieving Utes. Any one but a Devonsher could have gotten away with it. At least they never could have visited social ostracism for it on any but Devonshers."

"After all"—Peter was watching Eve keenly—"an Indian has the same rights as a white man."

"No, he hasn't!" Eve's voice was sharp. "We've massacre traditions in our family. Massacre and Indian rape. An Indian has no rights with a Devonsher."

She stared at the couch beyond the dining-room table as though she envisaged there such horrors as Peter had seen in No Man's Land. He began hazily to see vista beyond vista in his picture puzzle. He could not, however, bear the look in Eve's clear eyes, so he said in his gentle drawl:

"The pressure on your father must have been tremendous. I don't doubt that he had the makings of a ripping sort in him, just as you have. I want to know why—" He paused, then rose from his chair and took a turn up and down the room. He brought up beside Eve, who had changed from her chair to lean against the window sill. He laid his scarred hand on her arm. "You see," he said very simply, "I'm tired, rather. We all are tired, over there. And when one is very weary it grows difficult to carry on as one ought. When I came down here this spring I was about through with everything. And when the people here tried to cheat so outrageously on their horseflesh, I was fit to shoot myself—really. For, you see, it's not as if it were only in Wyoming or in the States that this sort of thing is happening. In England, in France, in Belgium, the people are gouging their governments even while they are giving their sons to be shot. It was because the thing was so universal that it depressed me so.

"And then when things seemed hopeless in Antelope Basin you took up the fight for the Allies. You stood alone. It was evident that there was much back of the violent resentment your neighbors felt over your attitude. It was evident that you were to undergo social ostracism for what you were doing. But you did it. Miss Devonsher, you were strong and ardent and flaming and you revived my hope in final decency."

All this time Peter kept his battle-marked hand on Eve's arm. She looked down at it, curiously. There swept over her a new conception of all that this English soldier had endured, of all that those other men fighting in France had endured. The look of hostility and of horror left her eyes and lips and was replaced by one of pity and loyalty and of admiration.

"You stood by me," Peter said. "Now I'm going to stand by you, in this outrageous situation. And when it's cleared up, you shall go to France. But to England first. I want to show you England."

"I don't know how I am coming through this." Eve's voice was suddenly breathless. "I may turn out to be a coward. One never knows."

"No! One never knows," agreed the major. "That's what we all wondered about ourselves when we first went to the front. But quite generally one does stand up. Just as you did when you decided to come back with the sheriff and the judge and me."

"I didn't make that decision. You made it for me."

"You made it for yourself and you made it gaily and gallantly, like the officer and gentleman you are." Peter suddenly and lightly saluted her.

SHE returned the salute with a fleeting smile that wrenched at the Englishman's well-controlled heartstrings. But he gave no outward evidence of this fact. The Chinaman came in to set the supper table. A moment later, Judge Jones's emaciated figure slowly passed the window. He entered the door with an air of reluctance, and crossed the room to stand before the two tall figures beside the window.

"Eve," he said, "Minnie Brownell and her mother have been raising merry hell. They've been telephoning Colonel Johnson and what with one thing and another it looks like I'd have to—to put you over in the—er—jail tonight."

Eve's eyes blazed. "But you told me you'd take my word for my not leaving the tavern, that the other was not necessary."

"I know I did. But I think it would be better in the long run for you to give in on this point. You know there's a lot of feeling about you here in the Basin."

"Then, after all"—Eve gave a sardonic smile—"you are not God, merely a demigod in Antelope Basin."

Judge Jones nodded. "Only a demigod."

Eve drew a deep breath and slowly her chin came up and her eyes filled with defiant fire. She looked more like a tall boy than ever. "If I go with you over to the jail, Willy Jones, I withdraw my promise about not leaving if I can and wish to."

"Well, I guess that's fair," said the judge. "We might as well go now, eh?"

Eve's ability to endure isolation and confinement in jail is to be tested to the full. The next instalment of "The Devonshers" will appear in May EVERYBODY'S, out April 15.

The Human Side of Racing

Weather Clear, Track Fast

A Get-away Day Intrigue in Which Jim Crow the Old Plater Assists Tony the Wop in Putting One Over on the Irish

By Sam Carson

WHEN Uncle Elam Spry turned sixty he celebrated by drinking four half-pints of white corn whisky. Instead of dying, as two doctors expected, Uncle Elam opened his bleary eyes eight hours later in Tony the Wop's dingy quarters, a hundred yards distant from the high board wall surrounding Churchill Downs racetrack. A warm May sun poured through a dusty window.

"I'm burning up," Uncle Elam groaned. "Gimme water—lots of it."

Tony was prepared for this emergency; he brought in a pitcher. "You feel better now?"

"Don't feel at all," Uncle Elam confessed, rubbing his unshaven chin experimentally. "I'm more'n half dead. A downright old fool, I am."

Tony grinned. The ways of this veteran of the stables fascinated the smiling, dark-faced youth known as Tony the Wop because his other titles were too numerous and alien. "You not bad," he volunteered; "you real man—drink all that moonshine."

"I'm a fust-class stableman, Tony," Uncle Elam reflected, "but I can't keep up the gait. Where'd you find me?"

"Down Central Street. You fight me—anybody—ever'body. I take you home. Ever'body laugh. Say you bad egg when drunk."

Tony's guest pondered over this information. "Gus Hartley see me?"

"Yeah—Gus see you. Look kinda sour."

"He would," Uncle Elam admitted thoughtfully. " 'Tain't been a week since I promised Gus to stay sober. Looks a heap like I'm to be fired."

"Oh, yes! You fired," Tony agreed cheerfully. "Mr. Gus give me note for you." He fumbled through the pockets of his oversize, patched trousers. "I got it."

But Gus Hartley, trainer for the Oldham Stables, hadn't fired Uncle Elam, at least in the note. Gus was nearly as old as the stableman, only he had fared better in worldly matters. The message was brief:

> Tom Osborne died Tuesday. He left Jim Crow to you and I'm holding him over at the stable.

"Well, I'll be dad-blamed!" Uncle Elam muttered. "Pore old Tom! Tony, I'm an owner—Jim Crow's my hawss."

"Tha's good," Tony grinned. "What you do with him—skin him?"

"No, you half-baked idiot. Jim Crow's still a race hawss. Getting old, though."

"Yes—old," Tony affirmed, face serious now. "Tom Osborne was good man. He—your crony, huh?"

Uncle Elam's eyes grew moist. "We was friends for more'n twenty years. Reckon it was his heart. Been afraid of it the last two years." He whirled in bed, let his feet to the floor. "Gosh! Head's swimming. Tony, reckon I'll go over and see Gus. Tom Osborne went down in Bourbon County last week. Must 'a' died there."

The stableman stumbled, and Tony gripped his arm.

"I go with you," the youth announced. "You not strong yet."

And thus the pair went over to the Oldham stable, Uncle Elam, leaden-hearted because he had lost his friend Tom Osborne, owner of a single horse, Jim Crow;

and Tony the Wop, who had no heart to be heavy; he had lost it to dark-eyed Peggy Sullivan.

Viewed from clubhouse and stands, the queer, fascinating world from stable to paddock is one group—one class of servants to his Majesty the Horse. They are the scene shifters in the Theater of Chance, dirty, usually; bow-legged, difficult to understand. Nevertheless, the lines of caste are drawn as carefully there as anywhere else. Owners, of course, come first. Next the trainers, then jockeys. After that, perhaps, veteran stablemen have their rating.

Swipes and hostlers are the buck privates, some with no standing at all. There are middle-aged workers who switch jobs so often they seldom know the names of horses under their care, simply recognizing them, for the time, by the stall numbers.

Tony the Wop belonged to that class, temporarily—except that Tony did know something of horses. And he was trying, with his quick, Latin mind, to know more. Tony had a watch, valuable, with a long hand instead of the regulation two. This hand would sweep around the dial upon pressing a certain button. In short, Tony was becoming a clocker, one of the tribe whose business it is to observe thoroughbreds in workouts and record their time. It is a fairly lucrative business, clocking. Men whose occupation consists of accepting bets upon races contribute to the upkeep of sharp-eyed figures who hang over fences from daybreak until late in the morning, watches handy.

Just now, however, Tony was only a hostler. That set him several grades below Matt Sullivan, trainer and father of Peggy. Matt's stable, the Beaufort, was a big one, successful for the last several seasons. Tony had to serve his apprenticeship, build up a reputation before hanging up his grooming kit and severing relations with tolerant Gus Hartley, of the Oldham Stables. What was more, Matt Sullivan, big of girth and with a wide face which could flame even ruddier than his hair, disliked this smiling, dark-faced son of Italy. It had never occurred to Matt that Peggy, oldest of his brood, was grown and slim and pretty; and that Tony the Wop was handsome in spite of a confident disregard in the matter of dress.

"Tony," Uncle Elam observed, gazing critically at Jim Crow, "I got a white elephant. Blamed old critter's seven years old. Only way he ever wins a race is to wait until the track's so heavy, or the other hawsses are so weighted down, that he just meanders by 'em. Not every day, either, they'll give him a chance. Wish Tom hadn't up and died."

"Goes a mile in one-forty," Tony said. "I time him—other morning."

"Yep," Uncle Elam agreed, "he's a one-forty hawss. And about two-thirds of the other hawsses here can make it in one minute and thirty-eight seconds. Mebbe not that many," he hedged, "but heaps of selling platers do it under one-thirty-nine."

"Mebbe you—"

TONY never finished that suggestion. In the doorway stood Peggy Sullivan, in sweater and riding skirt. She was not looking in, but had paused, gazing toward the track, as if in ignorance that she was anywhere near the Oldham stable. Tony trotted outside.

"Now that," Uncle Elam observed, "looks like the ruination of a fust-class clocker. There just naturally won't be any Tony the Wop if Matt catches them two courting."

Which was the uppermost thought in two young minds at that moment. Accordingly they chose a route skirting the stable buildings and leading into the deserted roadway alongside a street-car line. Peggy was enjoying the adventure because she had been served with an ultimatum the night before. It had concerned another young man than Tony, a member of the Mulligan clan who sold shoes.

Now it occurred to Peggy that if her father objected to her going to a dance with a Mulligan, so much that he had grown profanely eloquent, he would come very near the exploding point if he caught her talking—or walking—with Tony the Wop. Jimmie Mulligan was a nice boy, but—

"Tony," she sighed, "why don't you dress a little better—not so slouchy?"

Tony smiled, moved his shoulders expressively. "For why? I make fifteen dollars a week. I gotta save, huh? Put money in the bank. Mebbe—'fore long—I quit Mr. Hartley—go to work for myself. Then I got money."

"You save money on fifteen dollars a week?" she demanded. "It can't be much."

Tony the Wop's teeth flashed. "Sometimes five—mebbe more. I got three hundred dollars."

His smile vanished, dark brown eyes upon her. "When I'm with you," he announced gently, "I want to sing. I feel happy."

"You'd better keep the soft pedal on, Tony," reminded the practical daughter of the Sullivans. "It wouldn't be a good idea to advertise the fact that I'm in your company. Daddy seems terribly set on my being an old maid."

"Mebbe he'll change," Tony reflected, "when you marry me, huh?"

"Oh, is that so! And am I going to marry you?"

"Yes," Tony answered quietly. "I don't lie to you. I like you."

Peggy's quick tongue failed her. It always did when she was alone with Tony the Wop, despite his grimy face and outrageous appearance.

"You like me?" he insisted. "Some day I make plenty of money. Then Mr. Matt don't hate me so."

Peggy flushed, lowered her eyes. "I don't know why I do like you. You're a Wop—and different, somehow. But—let's go back, Tony. What about your clocking? Found any clients yet?"

"They laugh at me," Tony said sulkily. "But I know 'bout every horse on the track. I see things sometimes others miss. This Lady Drake filly. They sit on the fence with their watches and say she runs six furlongs in one-twelve. Me, I know better. She does it in one-eleven two-fifths. Old-timers, they are. Think I'm a fool."

"Never mind," Peggy consoled. "Keep it up. Some of these days you're going to uncover a dark horse. You can clean up in the pari-mutuels. Then laugh at them."

"Mebbe so," Tony agreed. "Some day I own horses—get Mr. Matt to train for me."

"You do," Peggy urged. "Who knows? They may launch the Irish navy yet."

They were back at the stables now—the parting of their ways. Tony, the hostler, dropped behind. "When I see you again?" he asked.

Peggy tossed her head. "When you put Daddy to work as trainer," she told him.

Tony grinned, trotted into the Oldham stable. All restrictions off now, he burst into song with all the vigor in his clear, young voice. Along the rows of stables men listened, to smile or grumble, according to their natures. And Peggy, hurrying out to the track where Matt Sullivan oversaw the rubbing down of a half-dozen lathered thoroughbreds, saw her father's ruddy face grow gentle.

"Gus Hartley's Wop has the gift of song," he mused. "Makes me think of the days when me 'n' the old lady—hello, Peggy!"

Back at his postponed job of shifting hay, Tony the Wop rendered "O Sole Mio" with the earnestness of a singer behind the footlights.

He continued until Uncle Elam's doleful countenance materialized in the feed-room doorway. "Hello!" Tony greeted. "You look bad."

"I feel plumb bad," Uncle Elam replied sorrowfully. "Tony, Tom Osborne passed away and left a fifty-dollar feed bill. And they're going to take out an attachment on Jim Crow if the fifty's not coming up."

"How much you got?"

"My total," Uncle Elam replied, rubbing his unshaven chin slowly, "is eight dollars and thirty cents. Gus promised me ten dollars advance."

"Eighteen dollars," Tony said. "You need—thirty-two more." He came out of the feed room. "Le's go look at Jim Crow."

TOM OSBORNE'S bequest was not an inspiring sight. Lean from many weeks of famine, the veteran of a hundred races surveyed the world with disappointed, hungry eyes. Moreover, the horse was extremely tall, light brown in color and with a coat of hair already shedding.

"Borrowed oats and hay from Gus this morning," Uncle Elam explained. "But I gotta move him—today. Wish I could sell him."

Tony shook his head. "I wouldn't sell him, Uncle Elam. Mr. Osborne think you take care of Jim Crow. Tell you what: You sell me one-half in Jim Crow. I give you"—he paused—"give you one hundred dollars."

The stableman rubbed his chin some more. "And split the feed bill—fifty-fifty?"

"Yeah. All right, huh? We owners now—Tony-Elam Stables, huh? Mebbe we get two horses—three."

"There ain't no more Tom Osbornes dying out," Uncle Elam reflected. "Reckon we'll be a one-hawss stable for a while."

"I dunno," Tony replied. "One-half hour and I tell a girl mebbe I own horses and hire her papa. She kinda laugh. But I got a half-interest in Jim Crow. Fast worker, huh?"

"Faster worker than the hawss," Uncle Elam mourned. "We got to find stable room and hire a boy for workouts. Know a colored boy, Mose Simpkins. I'll speak to him. But Jim Crow needs oats—and hay. He still thinks he's dreaming ever since Gus brought the hawss over here."

"All right," Tony agreed; "you trainer, Tony-Elam Stables. I gotta tell a girl 'bout it."

Unfortunately, Tony the Wop carried out his intention. His enthusiasm displaced sound judgment; for Tony called at the Sullivan house, strode rather magnificently to the front door and rang the bell.

Matt Sullivan, stirred because he had lost a race that afternoon in a nose finish, came out.

"Well, what d'ye want?"

Beyond the trainer's bulky form, Tony saw Peggy's startled face. She whirled toward the kitchen and spoke in low tones, whereupon Mrs. Sullivan and two little Sullivans peeped out.

Tony's spirits dropped to a low point. Perhaps he had made a profound mistake in calling. But he was an owner now. And Tony the Wop's inherent dramatic sense urged him on. He smiled ingratiatingly.

"I got a horse now—me 'n' Uncle Elam."

Sullivan's astonished look was some compensation. Tony hastened on: "Wanta tell Miss Peggy I got a start—Tony-Elam Stables."

"What in thunder has—my daughter—got to do with it?" the trainer demanded, face reddening. "Oh, Peggy!"

She came into the hallway. "I heard him," she said. "Tony insists he's going to hire you as trainer some day."

It wouldn't have been so bad if Matt Sullivan had exploded in profane wrath, or aimed a substantial foot at Tony the Wop. But the trainer did neither; he threw his head back and laughed heartily.

"Saints alive! Don't tell me Uncle Elam roped you in on Tom Osborne's old plater—Jim Crow."

Tony the Wop ceased to be. It was Antonio Abdo Lancia whose dark eyes narrowed, whose body grew tense beneath ragged, misfit clothing. Against love or pride, ridicule is a cruel weapon indeed. And the Lancias were a proud family, even if temporarily eclipsed. Matt Sullivan sensed the wrong his caller felt.

"No harm meant," he said; "just kidding you. But honest, Tony, Jim Crow's about ripe for a peddler's wagon. Tom Osborne never won but one race with the horse all of last season."

Peggy, on tiptoe, made frantic signals from the kitchen door. Translated, they meant, "Beat it." With commendable forethought she was anticipating her father's inevitable query: just why had Tony called?

Tony understood; and a smile returned to his face. "All right, Mr. Matt. Mebbe Jim Crow is good peddler's horse. But I run him. Mebbe Tony-Elam Stables catch you nappin'."

Matt Sullivan's eyes twinkled as the youth went down the walk. "Just like a young pup," he observed; "figures a horse is a horse because he's got four legs and an appetite." He paused thoughtfully. "But why did he— Thunderation! Oh, Peggy!"

Peggy was prepared for that emergency. Shooed out the back way by portly, smiling Mrs. Sullivan, she was headed for the house of her aunt, two blocks away. Matt's wrath was short-lived. So it was an old trick for his offspring to duck, return in an hour or so and be forgiven.

WHEN a race horse changes hands, the new owner usually selects an easy race in which to try out his property. It is one way of getting a certain line on the merits of the thoroughbred. Uncle Elam, by virtue of his rating as trainer for the Tony-Elam Stables, put Mose Simpkins in the saddle for five straight mornings with orders to find out if Jim Crow had any desire to run in his track-wearied heart. The net result was a deadlock of opinion. The old plater would lumber around the track—*tuk-a-lup—tuk-a-lup*. It made no difference what distance—half-mile, three-quarters, or one mile. Jim Crow went at it in the manner of one who is disillusioned.

Tony the Wop used his watch, but without a smile. "So slow," he mourned, one morning after a particularly slow workout. "Jus' like he have all day to go somewhere."

Uncle Elam, leaning over the track fence, massaged his chin thoughtfully. "A selling plater," he observed, "is that kind of a hawss because he don't know himself whether he can run or not. That's luck of the game. One day you own a handicap hawss. And then he gets hurt, or breaks down because he's been raced too much. After that he's a selling plater—good for selling or claiming races, according to the track you're at.

"JIM CROW," Uncle Elam continued, "is a selling plater. We gotta make the most of it. Just keep entering him, every third day. And then, all at once, he'll wake up. Then's when we cash in."

Tony sighed. "Wish he could run like Gatun. Catch him running six furlongs in one-thirteen 'bout daylight."

"Gatun's coming into form," Uncle Elam said. "Same age as Jim Crow—once a stake hawss." He climbed over the fence as the negro boy pulled Jim Crow up. "Hawss winded, Mose?"

The exercise boy grinned. "Ain't hu't none. But honest, Mr. Elam, 'at hawss groaned when I called on him to run. He's too lazy to live, Jim Crow is."

"That's what I'd call hawss sense," Uncle Elam commented, "not wanting to work. Reckon we'd better enter him in the seventh race Saturday—see what he aims to do. Say, Tony, we gotta register our colors."

"Huh!" Tony replied. "I got colors—yellow-red."

"I want some blue," Uncle Elam protested. "It's a pretty color."

Tony solved the problem. "Tell you what. Yellow blouse—red stripes—blue sash."

The yellow-red-blue combination was registered as the colors of the Tony-Elam Stables; and Jim Crow's name went through the entry box for the seventh race the coming Saturday. With a small income from his timing, and the remainder of his savings, Tony cut loose and became Jim Crow's personal attendant, sharing stable duties with Mose, the negro hostler. He labored so earnestly that he paid little attention when Gatun won his race and paid seven to one through the pari-mutuels. Tony had laid his dream of ownership upon solid foundations. Betting was a luxury.

Uncle Elam was more discreet. He chose to remain on the Oldham Stable pay-roll. Furthermore, he patronized the betting machines beneath the stands. This Tony knew full well, yet he never suspected the morning Uncle Elam asked for a loan. "Got some old bills—and there's thirty bones still against Tom Osborne—doctor's bill. Better straighten that out," he explained.

Tony, being a confiding soul, advanced fifty dollars and accepted his partner's I. O. U. He was filled with an exaltation of spirit. Jim Crow was going to race for him Saturday.

"Mr. Sullivan got a horse against Jim Crow Saturday," he informed Uncle Elam. "Stable boss told me—Bluefield. Mebbe we beat him, huh?"

The stableman drew forth a twisted tobacco plug from his overalls. Chewing wasn't exactly a habit with Uncle Elam; rather a bracer in time of deep thinking.

"Maybe," he decided. "Bluefield's younger—five years old—but a shore enough in-and-outer. Didn't think Matt would use him right now. Wonder what's happened to him—throwing his dogs into claiming races?"

Plenty had happened to Matt Sullivan, although neither Tony nor Uncle Elam knew. Just now the trainer was confined to his bed, grumbling because the tiny pine splinter which he had run into his foot one morning when building the breakfast fire at home wasn't behaving as splinters should. It should have come out, particularly since Matt had dug at the offending bit of wood with a sharp knife. But it hadn't. Sullen, purplish streaks were growing along his foot and ankle; and it was swollen. Saturday morning the trainer yielded to advice and sent for a doctor.

Peggy, a bit frightened and concentrated upon the business at hand, spent two hours over at the stables. Matt had been in charge of the Beaufort Stables so long few realized that a trio of business men back East owned the horses and expected results. And they had been getting results, for the last four years. But the Beaufort owners were thinking of today—and tomorrow. There were plenty of races yet to come on the Kentucky circuit—races in which

Beaufort entries were expected to play a leading part. Matt, flat on his back, did his best. He loaded Peggy with details and sent her over to see that his plans were carried out. She was out by the track, talking to Holmes, the stable boss, when Tony and Uncle Elam came along.

"Pap sick?" Uncle Elam inquired. "Ain't seen him for a couple of days."

She ignored Tony for the time. "Afraid it's blood poisoning," she replied; "splinter in his foot. They're going to operate—maybe tomorrow or Monday."

"Shore hate to hear that," Uncle Elam said. "Matt's so blamed healthy it'll go hard with him—laying up for a spell."

Peggy nodded, frowning as Tony came nearer. The burden of responsibility upon Peggy's young shoulders had made her a very serious person. But Tony the Wop hadn't seen the girl for a week. Moreover, the absence of Matt gave him courage.

"You run Bluefield today, huh?" he asked.

"And Walloon, too," she replied. "He's an added starter."

"Then I scratch Jim Crow," Tony announced, teeth flashing.

CHIVALRY was something Peggy Sullivan didn't crave just then. Her head went up. "Don't think your old horse can beat either Bluefield or Walloon. They will both finish in front of Jim Crow. Better scratch him because I don't intend for him to win."

"Mebbe," Tony persisted. "I thought—"

"You'd better keep him in the race," Peggy interrupted quietly. "Just consider it's Daddy instead of me. I'm acting for him."

Tony shook his head sorrowfully. At least he was honest—and frank. "I can't," he told her. "It's—different. Oh—well," he grinned suddenly, "I run Jim Crow, then—beat you, mebbe. You won't like that, huh?"

"That couldn't be helped," she decided, "only Jim Crow won't be a factor. I'm sorry, Tony. After it's over this afternoon I'll wish you better luck next time."

There was nothing to do but join Uncle Elam after that; for Peggy had turned to the stable boss, to discuss matters that needed attention. Tony got small consolation from his partner, for the stableman was plainly worried.

"Tony," he asked, "ever drop a letter in the mail box and then wish you hadn't?"

Tony shook his head.

"Well, it's a darned bad feeling to have—sort of like you'd eat too many green apples. Let's go and look our hawss over. Got keen competition today."

Peggy was a splendid prophet. Walloon won the seventh race, won it handily, with three lengths to spare. Jim Crow, however, was but a half-length behind Bluefield, the other Beaufort entry, who finished third. There was the usual group on the track, officials and hostlers, when Tony approached Peggy, grinning sheepishly.

But Matt Sullivan's daughter did not return his obvious congratulation. Rather flushed, she was looking at Uncle Elam, Tony's partner, who had just been given a pair of bridle lines. At the other end of the lines was Bluefield. And that was the cause of Peggy's upset.

"What you do with him?" Tony demanded of his partner.

"What!" Uncle Elam repeated. "Why, I figure on leading him over to the Tony-Elam Stables. About all I can do—now."

"Uncle Elam claimed him—Bluefield," Peggy said rather mechanically. "I didn't think you all would do me that way."

"You claim Bluefield," Tony protested hotly, "an' Miss Peggy my frien'—your frien'. Where you get money, I dunno. Give him back. Sure you give Bluefield back."

"I can't." Uncle Elam's lugubrious face grew even longer. "I can't. Got to hold him thirty days fust—them's the rules. Put the claim in last night before I heard Matt was sick—in the box at the secretary's office—"

Tony whirled to the girl. "Won't you believe me—Peggy? I no have anything to do with it. Sorry—so sorry as can be."

But the damage had already been done. Peggy's pride was wounded; too many were laughing at the little comedy out on the track. The Sullivan spirit was aflame. "Your partner took Bluefield away from me," she said. "That means war—on any track. I—" She halted. "I can't wish you better luck next time. It's—good-by."

Tony couldn't be blamed for failing to realize the significance of Peggy's words all at once. It was every bit as amazing as if the Statue of Liberty had suddenly materialized in place of the infield flagpole. Tony felt sick, and hot and cold together. The terrible fact that Peggy had told him good-by was nightmarish, incredible nearly.

All at once Tony the Wop found himself alone, Peggy going through the gate and Uncle Elam leading Bluefield up the track, Mose and Jim Crow following. Uncle Elam's bowed head, stumbling gait bespoke a man in sorrow. And somehow Tony could not find it easy to be angry at his partner. Abruptly he turned his back on the stands and crossed to the infield. He overtook Uncle Elam at the back-stretch fence.

"Well," the stableman asked, "mad?"

"I dunno," Tony replied. "Feel like I'm dead. We quit Tony-Elam Stables. You take 'em—Jim Crow—everything. Where you got money," he demanded fiercely, "—money for Bluefield?"

"I took that fifty you loaned me," Uncle Elam explained, "and I built up a shoestring pile of jack on the tips you gave me every day—on hawsses you seen work out. There was Gatun—and Lady Drake—and Millet, for instance. I had eleven hundred dollars in the bank—to our credit. I knowed Bluefield was a better hawss than Matt figured. Reckon he'll be a right handy hawss some day. So I claimed him—dropped a check in the box before we saw Peggy. That's that."

"That ruined me," Tony announced solemnly. "We split, Uncle Elam. I'd burn up—ever' time I see Bluefield."

They were at the stable now. Uncle Elam laid his hand on Tony's shoulder. It was trembling slightly. "Son, I know it's hell. But you come to me in the morning and tell me what you aim to do. It's all too close on you now. Work some of it off."

Tony began right. He went to the Sullivan home at eight o'clock. At eight-five he was walking violently down the sidewalk, outward bound. Peggy had slammed the door in his face. Of course Tony did not know that she fairly ran to her room and plunged across the bed, crying because of her own stubbornness.

There were stories of a blazing-eyed Tony the Wop who amazed even the unholy hangouts near the track—of an olive-skinned youth who gurgled down fresh-made moonshine and dared the world to interfere—of a pugnacious Tony who issued challenges which weren't accepted. And at last, when a tolerant police district realized Tony would have to retire or be locked up, Uncle Elam overtook his partner offering insults to a poster on a side-street billboard.

"Let's go home, son," Uncle Elam proposed.

"No. I go 'way—clear 'way from Louisville," Tony announced. "No good here any more."

"Before you go," Uncle Elam said gently, "you might be glad to know that Uncle Elam hunted you up and told you something."

"Huh! What you tell me?"

"Matt Sullivan's been sent to the hospital—tonight. They gotta cut off his leg."

Tony's face changed in color so quickly that his partner was alarmed. The youth grasped Uncle Elam's arm, sober now. "Peggy mebbe gonna lose her papa? You joking," he protested hopefully.

"Wish I was," Uncle Elam replied sadly. "Saw 'em loading Matt in the ambulance an hour ago. Peggy went with him."

"Huh!" Tony the Wop, for all his fighting lust of preceding hours, blinked rapidly. "Huh! What we do, Uncle Elam? What we gonna do?"

"Reckon we'd better go home. Ain't nothing to gain by staying outside. And it looks kind of like rain."

THE specialists compromised in Matt Sullivan's case; they amputated his foot, deciding that the remainder of his stricken limb could be saved. To the huge figure, helpless in a white room of the silent hospital, it was every bit as great a disaster as if he had lost both legs. It would be weeks before he could move around, months before an artificial foot could be adjusted. Matt alternately wept and cursed the tiny splinter that had caused it all. But, by degrees, he turned to an economic problem that grew larger with time.

It was a problem that embraced the entire Sullivan clan, stout, pleasant Mrs. Sullivan, Peggy, and the two younger children. His income certain to be cut off, Matt had no resources. The Sullivans lived in a rented house, lived well because the trainer had been earning two hundred dollars a month. None of his family was extravagant, nor a spendthrift. But Matt hadn't saved any money; and he had scorned life or accident insurance. Frequently he had made much more than his salary, and had as promptly let it go. Now his bank balance would not cover his hospital and operation bill.

Peggy was still permitted to have charge of the Beaufort Stables. But that, he realized, was temporary. Eventually Simpson of Baltimore, or crisp, efficient Stark of Chicago, would drop down and investigate. Such a trip would mean the end. There would be a new trainer. Matt might have his job back when he recovered; and again, he might have to seek a new employer. He could get another place. But the chief worry was money until then.

The end came sooner than Matt had expected. The season was very near the close when Matt, white and gaunt, was sent home, to sulk in his wheel-chair. He was a subdued Matt good-natured Mrs. Sullivan couldn't understand. So he was left alone a great deal, waiting through dreary afternoons for Peggy's return. After that, it was not so bad; there was a bond of understanding between father and daughter. Matt was dozing one afternoon, to awake quickly as Peggy entered. One swift glance revealed eyes that were red. Matt gazed out of the windows for a long time.

"Did they come down?" he asked.

Peggy knelt beside the chair. "It was—Mr. Stark," she sobbed. "Bobbed up this afternoon. Saw Holmes—dodged me—until after the races. He's—going to let—you go. Hired a man from the East—Burcham. You're to get your check—and a letter."

Matt stroked her hair gently. "I know what the letter will say. I've been dread—expecting it."

He took her face between hands still large and strong. "You're a sticker, daughter. I've been hard on you—going with the boys. But I'm getting old. And I don't want to lose you. After this—go with 'em—all or any of 'em. I'm never going to lose you."

"No," she affirmed.

"It's a hard world," he mused, "when you can't see nothing but the dark side." He chuckled suddenly. "Gus Hartley now—the rascal paid my house rent and tried to get Pitney to explain I'd overpaid the last quarter."

"I'm going to work," Peggy announced. "Over at the veneer factory. Fifteen dollars a week in the billing office."

And thus Matt and his daughter, cheered somewhat, planned their way to another independence, while Tony the Wop and Uncle Elam met in a stall next to Bluefield and Jim Crow where they talked in the manner of conspirators. They were in a building occupied by other small owners. It was feeding time, men running up and down the corridors, darkies singing, an hour when contentment prevails and every one plans and dreams of the morrow.

Uncle Elam was rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Yes," he announced, "looks like we've had blind luck about Bluefield. Wasn't even a hunch that made me put him in blinkers—just wanted to see if they made him nervous, in case I'd ever have to use 'em on him."

"Make him run like—like hell," Tony observed. "Mile in one-thirty-eight."

"Reckon we'll try him out in the Southern Handicap get-away day," Uncle Elam decided. "Does any good, we'll come right back with him at Latonia—in the Quickstep. They'll let him at one hundred pounds—I'm certain of that."

"They do," Tony reflected, "and we damn near won a race."

And then Uncle Elam exploded a bomb. "Hear the Beaufort folks have fired Matt Sullivan—hired a trainer named Burcham—high-priced man. Hard on Matt's family."

Tony's eyes widened. "Peggy all smiles this morning. She speak to me."

"Peggy," Uncle Elam explained, "never knew it this morning. It all happened after the races, Gus Hartley told me."

"THEY busted," Tony said. "Mr. Matt—Peggy—what they gonna do?"

"Keep a stiff upper lip, for one thing," Uncle Elam reflected. "They're that sort. Tony," he added, "we've got a find in Bluefield. We took the hawss away from Peggy. And he was the Beaufort Stables' property. We're going to win a race with him. That means money."

"You ol' fool," Tony sobbed, grabbing his partner, "you good ol' fool! Sure I get you. Run Bluefield as Peggy's purse—our bets. We win—hot dog!"

"It's for five thousand dollars—the

Southern," Uncle Elam observed. "Fust thing, let's try to win that race. Getting Matt Sullivan to take part of it can be figured out later. Hey, Mose! Trot over here a minute."

In the discussion that followed, it was decided to send Bluefield out for a fast half-mile workout at dawn the next morning, Mose to finish out the mile in slower time so as to throw the clockers off. That newly discovered burst of speed was worth covering up. Uncle Elam trembled with excitement. He had a real horse, not a Jim Crow. The Southern Handicap was a race worth winning. Exterminator had fought for it twice—and won it—twice. Bluefield would be worth something if he could go the mile and quarter ahead of such sturdy competition as he would be certain to face.

TONY missed Peggy the next morning, else she would have gathered what was coming off. But Peggy was out after money herself; she had already begun work at the veneer plant's office. Perhaps it was better that Tony failed to see the girl, for he was exalted with the knowledge that Bluefield had done even better than in the first tryout. It meant nothing to him that Leghorn, a powerful cup runner, was entered, or that Akmed, also a four-year-old, had won his sixth straight race and his owner intended to make the Southern Handicap his seventh.

Because the Oldham Stables were not trying for the race, and since he yearned for advice, Uncle Elam confided in Gus Hartley, gave him full details and asked for an opinion. For that act the Tony-Elam Stables were loaned the services of Eddie Womack—Long Shot Womack—contract rider for the Oldham Stables.

And then Uncle Elam invited public derision; he sent Jim Crow's name along with Bluefield's for the race—the two an entry, and engaged Watson, an apprentice, as jockey.

"What you do that for?" Tony demanded, when the entry list was published Friday afternoon. "Jim Crow got no chance. Folks laughing at us."

"Reckon they'll quit laughing if we put our entry over," Uncle Elam replied soberly. "That race is for a mile and quarter. I'm scared Akmed and Leghorn and Bluefield's going to run that fust mile too fast. They're all front runners. And Mose tells me Bluefield just naturally will get out and go into high. Jim Crow's a hawss that comes from behind to win. And if tomorrow's his day, he'd beat stake hawsses just as quick as platers."

Matt Sullivan, reading the sporting pages, saw the Tony-Elam entry and had his first real laugh for weeks. He showed the list to Peggy, tired from a good day's work. And the girl smiled absently.

"I could nearly root for them," she said, "if Uncle Elam hadn't claimed Bluefield from me. I hope they run where they should—last."

Peggy meant that—or believed she did. She was certain of it early that night when she started out to the corner drug store to get a prescription filled. It was shortly after eight o'clock, when the little world circling Churchill Downs was astir. And Peggy, not unused to surprises, gasped at the sight of a magnificent Tony the Wop who confronted her on the drug-store sidewalk. Gone were his ancient trousers, flannel shirt and dirty, twisted cap. And in place thereof were inconspicuous brown shoes, straw hat and blue worsted suit.

"I see you," Tony announced; "gotta talk with you."

"Tony," she breathed, "I'm surprised."

"Surprised, huh? Well, I got a bigger surprise tomorrow—mebbe. Want to see a horse with yellow and red—and blue sash—win a race?"

"Bluefield?"

"Yeah."

Peggy sniffed. "I'd like to see him run—last."

"Huh! I betcha! Betcha Bluefield's first. Betcha thousand dollars—against what you name."

"Why not make it a million or so?" she parried. "Not just pin money."

"You laugh at me," Tony complained. "Now I tell you something. We gonna win. Split purse with your papa. That's fair, huh? Then we all laugh at Beaufort Stables."

Peggy was incredulous. "You mean you're running Bluefield—for Daddy's benefit?"

"Well—it's like this. We claim Bluefield from you, huh? Owe you something. Uncle Elam say so."

"It wouldn't be right," she decided. "You paid your eleven hundred for Bluefield. He wasn't our horse, anyway. It's fine sentiment, Tony, but poor business policy. We're not broke, if we are badly bent. All the same," she added, "what you wanted to do counts a heap. I understand —even if Daddy wouldn't. And I take it all back—wanting Bluefield to run last. I'll be over in the stands tomorrow—praying for your horse to come in first."

Saturday came with cloudless skies and a warmth that brought out extra thousands to the track. Get-away day is fascinating; there are hundreds present, confirmed betters, eager to play the final program. There are others who attend, and sigh with relief as the last-stretch battle passes into history.

And today there were many who came because of the tradition attached to the running of the Southern Handicap. Leghorn was an attraction, although the valiant campaigner was growing old. Akmed, younger, had been somewhat of a sensation on the winter circuit. And both were carrying imposts of more than a hundred and twenty pounds, a weight that means the loss of a second in a mile-and-quarter race. Now since a second means five lengths, on the average, the handicaps of the two high-weight entries made the affair an open one.

Uncle Elam did the honors at the paddock, studying Bluefield closely, while Tony the Wop remained in the box of the humble Jim Crow. He was growing indignant under the fire of comment from lookers-on.

"Dunno why Uncle Elam had to race Jim Crow," he protested as Watson, the apprentice rider, came in. "Not a chance."

Watson grinned. "Wish I had a pair of glasses. I'd watch the race. Eddie Womack tells me Bluefield's got a chance."

Tony nodded. "He'll be there when they straighten out for home. Jim Crow—huh!"

The bugle sounded. Watson went into the saddle. "So long, Tony. I'll tell you about the race on the back stretch. You tell me about it on this side."

THERE was a certain thrill in the sight of two red and yellow blouses with blue sashes in the line of thoroughbreds parading to the barrier. But Tony, as his right hand closed about two fifty-dollar tickets on the Tony-Elam entry, felt that hopeless despair which every owner goes through as he marks another horse the favorite. And Leghorn was the favorite as he trotted along, a magnificent, dark-brown animal, the number one entry. It was a tense wait as the starter's assistants aligned the entries, and Tony's eyes swept the crowded stands. Somewhere up there Peggy was sitting, presently to stand, to scream, to pull for Bluefield. While he was gazing at the colorful mass of humanity, there arose that never-to-be-forgotten sound—"they'r-r-re off."

Down the track they came, Leghorn ahead, skimming along the rail, Akmed leaping from the outside, to battle with the leader. Tony jumped upward, caught a glimpse of red and yellow—Bluefield, the fifth horse, with Long Shot Womack working his mount through an opening.

"Hot dog!" Tony shouted. "Keep it up, Eddie!"

He forgot about Jim Crow until the field, already stringing out, swept around the clubhouse turn. And there, last, was old Jim Crow, lumbering in vain to keep up. As Tony noted the old plater, a lump came into his throat. "Poor fellow!" he muttered. "Shame on Uncle Elam!"

But his remorse was short-lived. Bluefield was coming up, lapped on Akmed and both a length short of the flying Leghorn. They were going at a tremendous clip. Tony, with the instinctive timing of the clocker, knew the pace was too fast. "Half in forty-six seconds," he observed. "Too damn fast."

And still Leghorn held to his one-length lead, Akmed and Bluefield unchanged. Up the back stretch, past a cheering line of stablemen the game old campaigner led his field. And, with daylight showing between him and the rest, lumbered Jim Crow—last.

One mile, and a half-furlong from the turn above the home stretch. The field thundered into the turn, Leghorn without a let-up.

The howl from thousands increased—grew into a roar which was one prolonged call for Leghorn. They had gone a mile now—in one minute and thirty-seven seconds.

"Keeps that up and there'll be a new track record," some one bawled in Tony's ear.

But Tony did not respond. He realized that danger already. Couldn't anything stop Leghorn? It seemed as if he would lead every foot of the way. There came a sudden whirling, a shifting at the head of the stretch. Voices dropped. For it is here races are lost—often. Leghorn seemed to be engulfed in a welter of brown and flashing silks. A new sound arose—from Akmed's supporters. And it too, died away swiftly. And then it was that Tony the Wop screamed shrilly. Bluefield was out in front, Long Shot Eddie Womack working with arms and body and whip.

"Eddie—Eddie—Eddie!" Tony yelled. "Make him come on!"

But Bluefield began to falter. His brief leadership was challenged by the rush of a light brown shape from the outside—a lumbering, steady-gaited horse that ran as if there were no race at all.

Tony stared, too amazed to make a sound. And small wonder; for other thousands were just as astounded. Jim Crow was overhauling his running mate, young Watson sobbing for sheer joy because his mount was going into the lead. The apprentice had never ridden a winner in a big race; and this gift from the gods of chance was nearly too much.

The last hundred yards saw surprising things—some ten thousand persons absolutely silent as Jim Crow went by Bluefield with that clumsy, steady stride of his, to win going away.

THERE was a meeting at the Sullivan home that night, a session extraordinary. Matt was flushed, angry; and Uncle Elam and Gus Hartley were rather helpless in the matter of winning a certain argument. Matt, exceedingly flushed and stubborn, had the floor—or rather the wheel-chair.

"I've told you two fools no as many times as I intend to," he stormed. "If you want to loan me a couple of hundred dollars, all right. I'll give you a note. But saints alive! I ain't a pauper yet. And I ain't going to take a gift of a thousand dollars. You birds can't afford to give me that much and I know it. It's the biggest piece of foolishness I've heard tell of."

"Reckon if we don't figure that way, you oughtn't to," Uncle Elam retorted. "Kind of feel you've got an interest in Bluefield."

"Bluefield!" Matt Sullivan chuckled in spite of his wrath. "Bluefield, me eye! He didn't win."

"No," Uncle agreed, "—no, he didn't." Facing the door, the senior partner of the Tony-Elam Stables watched Peggy tiptoe through the hall, heard the door latch click easily. Hartley, being hard of hearing, could not be aware of a certain little drama being enacted a dozen feet away. Uncle Elam smiled. "No, Bluefield didn't win. But he shore did run Leghorn into the ground so that Jim Crow could lope along and go by the judges fust."

Curiosity was possessing Uncle Elam. He knew that Tony the Wop had stood just outside the kitchen door of the Sullivan residence for the last half-hour; and he had not been alone. And now Tony, dressed in his very best, had come in by way of the front door.

Matt was talking again, something about his plans. But Uncle Elam paid little attention. He maneuvered so that he gained the hall door.

"I go to school," a husky young voice was saying, "—night school. They gonna teach me lots of things. Peggy—you love me like I love you?"

Silence. Then: "I surely must love you, Tony. . . . I—lost my appetite the day Uncle Elam claimed Bluefield—and I told you good-by."

Matt demanded a reply to some question, and Uncle Elam answered rather vaguely.

"You know," drifted in from the hall, "I don't even know your real name."

"That's all right," Tony laughed softly. "You'll know it well enough—before long, huh."

Uncle Elam walked back to the wheel-chair, pointed his finger at Matt. "There ain't many cinch bets in the racing game," he announced. "But there's two I'm real shore of. One of 'em is that you're gonna take that thousand dollars, and the other is you're going to work for the Tony-Elam Stables."

Matt Sullivan stared at his caller, too full for words.

"And you're going to do it," Uncle Elam chuckled, "because it looks a heap like the Tony-Elam outfit's going to be tied up with your family."

Another of Carson's stories of the human side of racing in May EVERYBODY'S, out April 15.

The Reckoning at Selapiu

When Two Men with Opposite Eccentricities Meet There's Likely to Be a Tug of War. Another Story of the South Sea Millionaire

By Albert Richard Wetjen

A MILLIONAIRE has some right to be eccentric. It is expected of him. The dollars behind him mold opinion as flame molds wax. That is so even in the case when the man is well hated, and when the man is loved an amused smile usually accompanies the tolerant word. So it was that, when Seth Orville, downing gin-and-ginger-ale highballs with monotonous regularity in Charley Roberts' saloon in Apia, suddenly rose from his table, upsetting his chair with a crash, and flung his dilapidated sun helmet on the cool floor with an oath, men merely glanced at him and smiled and turned away.

His little sun-dried body positively quivered with rage. He looked for a moment as if he were about to jump on his helmet. But he stamped on the floor instead and shook both fists in the air. His clear gray eyes, that not even drink could dim, were afire with rage. The man opposite him at the table looked up in astonishment and raised a restraining arm. But Orville snorted and ignored it.

"Come here!" he shouted in a high-pitched, querulous voice.

There was a general turning of heads, and conversation throughout the saloon was suspended for a moment. A broad-shouldered, smooth-faced giant with yellow hair and clear blue eyes broke from the group of schooner captains near the door and came forward. He touched the peak of his white-topped seaman's cap as he spoke.

"Sir?"

"Peterson! What the hell are you doing here?"

Jack Peterson laughed rather bitterly and dropped into a vacant chair. He nodded courteously to Wallace Hawke, Orville's companion.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" he said.

Orville snorted, but he sat down. He thumped on the table, glared at the waiter and handed him his empty glass.

"I put you in charge of my trading post at Selapiu. That was three months ago. What the hell are you doing here? Six months, you were to stay." He half emptied his refilled glass at a gulp.

Peterson leaned forward and his great fists clenched on the table top. "I want to see you, sir, on a most important matter. . . . I left McGraw in charge of the station while I went across to survey some new land on Bangatang Island——"

"Like your damned cheek! Do you know, sir, do you know, I ought to thrash you within an inch of your life? . . . Mutiny, by thunder! Mutiny! Preposterous! You draw my pay and eat my grub, not to speak of drinking my gin, and then you desert your post. For a damned whim! Who the hell told you to survey new land? I've a good mind to— Waiter, my glass is empty again!"

"Keep quiet, Orville." Wallace Hawke, master and owner of the trading brig *Flying Fish*, and the millionaire's best friend, spoke soothingly across the table. "Keep quiet! You'll have the place in a ferment in a minute——"

"Damn the saloon! I'll buy the place before I'll allow it to ferment. You, Peterson, answer my questions! I take you up from bumming about the beaches and I make a man out of you. And now you've the blasted audacity—audacity, I say—to come snooping through Apia to see me. On what? Eh? A most important matter?

Most important matter be damned! What the devil do you want with me? More pay? More gin? All some of you seamen think of is drinking. . . . H'm . . . Huh! . . . Confounded impudence! Desert your post. How do I know——"

"Just a minute, sir. Give me a chance to talk."

"Nonsense! You can't talk to me. I'm too busy. Pressure of affairs too big to allow of idle conversation. I don't want to hear one word. Not a word, sir! You just get straight back to Selapiu. Not a word. No! I will not——"

"Listen to what he's got to say, Orville. Don't go off like a confounded rocket just because he's in Apia," said Hawke with a touch of irritation, for heads were beginning to turn in the direction of the table again.

"No, Wallace, I refuse to listen to any one. This is not the first time he's deliberately disobeyed my orders. I'm not saying he wasn't justified before. But there can be no such excuse this time. No, sir. When did you come in?"

"Two hours ago, sir, on the *Kaurie.*"

"The what? The *Kaurie!* What the hell were you doing on the *Kaurie?* What's the game? The *Kaurie's* the mail boat from Sydney. You'll tell me next you never even went to Selapiu where I sent you."

"Yes, sir, I did. If you'll let me talk a bit——"

"Not a word, sir; not a word. Waiter, give Mr. Peterson a drink. I've a good mind to fire you—yes, fire you, sir. I cannot understand——"

"Do you see this!"

The yellow-haired giant spoke imperiously, stopping Orville in mid-career. He pulled up his right coat sleeve with a sudden movement and exposed an ugly scar running from elbow to wrist along the inside of the tanned arm, red and wide, plainly caused by a spear or a tomahawk blow.

ORVILLE gazed blankly at the wound for a long minute. The change that swept over him was absolute. His mustache ceased to bristle. His eyes grew dreamy and held a far-away look. He peered up into Peterson's face with a frown as if searching for something, and then with a grunt he stooped and fished his sun helmet from under the table and placed it on the table beside his elbow. He finished his drink with great deliberation and set the glass down with a slight bang. He shot a look at Hawke, who was gazing at the ugly scar, and then spoke quietly, staring Peterson full between the eyes.

"Natives?"

"Yes, sir."

"Trading station?"

"Gone."

"McGraw?"

"Gone."

"Dead?"

"Don't know. Just disappeared."

"How'd you get away?"

"Came back from Bangatang Island one evening and found the station in ashes, still smoldering. Bodies of four of the Samoan house boys we took were lying about, heads gone. McGraw, I couldn't find a trace of—at first. I went to the nearest village to inquire and found he'd been taken into the hills by a chief named Kambiera. I was attacked in the bush after leaving the village. Got away in my whaleboat that I'd taken to and come from Bangatang in. Sailed south for five days and then picked up schooner *Water Witch* trading in the Bismarcks. Landed in Suva last week and caught the *Kaurie* to come here and tell you."

"That's all?"

"That's all."

"I sent you to Selapiu to found a trading station so that I could buck Forsyths' on the New Britain coast. Was the venture successful at all?"

"Yes, sir—at first. We were doing fine."

"There's possibilities there?"

"Big ones, sir."

"As I thought."

There was silence for a while. Then Wallace Hawke sighed.

"Too bad, Orville. Suppose you'll have to get the Government to send a cruiser. Much money invested in the venture?"

"About two hundred pounds in stores. That doesn't matter a damn! It's McGraw I'm thinking of, and my station. And I'll handle the affair myself. You'll go back, Peterson!"

It was partly a question, partly an order. The yellow-haired giant, still staring full into Orville's eyes, answered without hesitation.

"If you say so, sir."

Orville snorted and jerked nervously at his mustache.

"Forsyths' have been worrying me a bit lately. I've got to have another station in the Bismarcks. And I've never failed to plant a post yet where I wanted one." He snorted again and his voice rose querulously. Now he had his information and understood matters he reverted to his old manner. "Waiter!" He thumped the table top vigorously. "Fill the glasses. Damn it all, Peterson, I'm ashamed of you. Come back to an old man like me to get you on your feet. Well, well, the *Sea Bird* sails tomorrow for Hixon Bay. We'll run to Selapiu in her and get things straightened out."

"You going to start another station there, Orville?" asked Hawke doubtfully, twisting his white mustache and shaking his head.

"I am. Do you think I allow a few blasted Kanakas to chase me away? They can wipe out a dozen stations and I'll still start another. The only way to teach Kanakas sense, Wallace, is to come down on them good and hard. Let 'em see you won't stand any nonsense. You know that; or you ought to by this time. You've been in the Islands long enough. But there won't be any more of my stations wiped out on Selapiu, never fear. I'll attend to that m'self."

Peterson pulled down his sleeve, shutting the ugly scar from view. He grunted. He had great faith in his employer though Seth Orville was not very much to look at.

Shamelessly dressed for a millionaire was the little, yellow-skinned man. His whites were old, stained and creaseless. For all that he owned more schooners, more islands and plantations and pearling rights than any other man in the South, his canvas shoes had never been cleaned since the day he had bought them in Marie's little store next the saloon. Despite the fact that the finest schooner captains, planters and traders in the Pacific called him "sir" and drew his pay, his dark tie and his white silk shirt were gray with cigar ash.

His time was spent in Apia, and mostly in the Apia saloons; and, as all men knew, he was seldom otherwise than slightly drunk, although his peculiar jog-trotting walk was never affected, nor was his keen brain dulled. He weighed perhaps one hundred pounds, was five feet one inch in height, and his chest measurement went below thirty. Perhaps that was why his hobby was men, big men physically and mentally, preferably the former, and it was his boast that he had picked and molded every man in his employ.

His had been a name to conjure with in the old Pacific days, and though the old days had passed he was still a power in the South and a driving force in Island affairs. Occasionally, when a certain serious problem cropped up—such as the one his favorite employee Peterson had just brought him—he would go and tackle it himself for the sake of old times and to prove to his friends and his enemies that he never sent a man to do what he could not do himself.

"I COULDN'T find out definitely whether McGraw was killed or not, sir," ventured Peterson. "It appears, from what I could learn at the coast village I went to, that the station was raided one night by Kambiera, who's the big chief of the whole island, though the coast people denied to me they had anything to do with him. I think that's a lie, for they wouldn't give me any information at first. I had to persuade a young buck to talk and it took quite a while."

"Need much persuading?" Orville snarled, jerking at his wisp of mustache.

"A little. I had a couple of Samoan boys with me. We held the young feller over an ants' nest for half an hour and then he talked like a bird. I've a notion he led the party that bush-whacked me later, though I couldn't be sure, for it was nearly dark when I got away. Lost one boy. The other's down by the offices now courting some girl."

"Huhuh! You think then all the Kanakas are ruled by this—what the hell's his name? Kambiera?"

"Certain of it. The island's only five miles long by two wide and every Kanaka is related to every one else. And you know how they stick together like glue. This Kambiera's got a place in the hills where he retires to when he's pulled off something naughty, so I understand. He's never bucked white men before, so he isn't afraid of them. Thinks they're soft, I imagine."

"Huh! I'll trim his whiskers. And if McGraw's alive, which I doubt, I'll get him. Also I'll teach that blasted Kambiera

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a lesson he'll never forget. Run along now, m'lad, and be on the *Sea Bird* tomorrow morning at eight. We sail with the tide. . . . No, I'm not leaving here yet. You run along. Good night!"

"Good night, Peterson," echoed Hawke, as the yellow-haired giant rose with a grin and made his way to the door, nodding here and there to some acquaintance who flung a laughing word at him.

Orville grunted and glared around for a waiter. "Damned bad service here," he snarled.

IT HAD been late when Orville left the saloon and went home to bed, but he must have found time somewhere on the way to his house, or very early next morning, to get things organized for the new plantation on Selapiu. For at eight o'clock, when Jack Peterson made his way down to the water front and boarded the schooner *Sea Bird*, he found all things ready.

Orville was walking the poop, smoking a cigar, his sun-helmet jammed over his eyes and his thin nervous hands clasped behind his back. Astern, to the port side of the wheel, where a Samoan seaman stood idly turning the spokes in his great hands, two sparsely dressed, unshaven men talked together. One of these Peterson recognized as Mulvaney, the captain of the *Sea Bird*, while the other, a short stocky man with a black beard, he learned afterward was Collins, the new assistant trader for Selapiu. On the fo'c's'le-head, laughing at some joke a broad-faced Samoan seaman had just told him, was Holt, the young mate of the schooner, who called a cheerful "Good morning" to Peterson as he clambered up the gangplank.

Orville stopped short in his walk, chewed on his cigar for a moment and then glared at his favorite.

"Come on!" he snarled. "The whole blasted work's balled up waiting for you."

Peterson pulled out his watch anxiously and then sighed with relief.

"It's only five past eight," he said, with a note of protest in his deep voice.

"Eight o'clock, I said! Jump to it now and get on the poop here. . . . Let go for'ard, Mr. Holt. . . . After lines clear, Mulvaney? Put your helm to starboard. Get a line aboard that launch. . . . The fate of empires has been settled in five minutes, Peterson. Is that clear?"

Peterson grunted but made no reply. He retired to the side of Collins and discussed Selapiu with him until the voice of Orville, as the *Sea Bird* cleared from the wharf and headed out of the harbor, brought him round with a start.

"C'mon below, the both of you. Le's drink. This climate never did agree with me. . . . Wind's not too bad, Mulvaney. Get all on her." He flung the last few words back to the captain as he descended the saloon companion. Mulvaney grunted and began to shout orders. One by one the sails went up. Orville could be heard below swearing at the steward and then Peterson and Collins, laughing together, went to join him.

"And never put ginger ale with my whisky. Is that clear, steward?" Orville was saying. "I only take that with gin. Whisky's always to be served straight or with soda. Understand? Then don't forget. It's a most important matter. I bungled a ten-thousand-pound deal once because my house boy put ginger ale in the whisky. . . . 'Lo, Peterson an' Collins. Two more glasses, steward. . . . My word, boy, you hurry up a lot of times! I'll knock seven bells outa you!"

The steward, a Raratongan, was electrified into action. He had never had occasion to wait on Orville before and he was anticipating a very lively voyage after the first five minutes. He described it afterward as being one continual walk to and from the lazarette, and a perpetual opening of small square wooden cases.

The *Sea Bird* made an uneventful voyage to Funafuti in the Ellice Islands, where perhaps the most beautiful lagoon in the world is situated, and where Orville and Company had a big trading and a smaller whaling station. After Funafuti the schooner sailed west to Utupua in the Santa Cruz group and arrived just in time to bury an assistant copra planter and save the dead man's superior from going mad with loneliness. With the living planter at Utupua, Orville left four cases of gin and promised to send another assistant before the year was out. From Utupua the *Sea Bird* slid northwest through the Indispensable Strait, between San Cristoval and Malaita in the Solomons, made a brief stay at Bougainville Island to see about the prospects of trading there, and then sailed farther northwest to Hixon Bay, New Britain, in the great Bismarck Archipelago.

Three days after leaving Hixon Bay the schooner raised the misty low coasts of Selapiu, an island scarce known, half of its coast lines vaguely dotted in on the charts, lying south of the scarcely better known island of Bangatang, between the Byron Strait and the northwestern coast of New Ireland.

Orville had stopped at the place some ten years before when on a trading voyage through the Bismarck, and had then seen the possibilities of a trading-post there. The island was convenient to several others of a like size and was apparently very densely populated. The soil was ideal for coconut palms and Orville had put off settling the place only because of the pressure of other affairs.

The *Sea Bird* dropped anchor off the shelving beach, fringed with palms and breadfruit trees and marred by the blackened heap of timber and coral blocks that had once been a house and store and had contained, from the native point of view, so much wealth. Orville surveyed the cove and grunted. Collins stood on one side of him and Peterson on the other. The two schooner officers, Mulvaney and Holt, stood in the background and yawned. Their business was not concerned with trading-posts.

"NO CANOES," said Orville, lighting a cigar and glaring along the beach. "Did the natives meet you before when you anchored?"

"No, sir," answered Peterson. "They came down to the beach and looked at us but didn't seem very interested. As for canoes, I don't think they have many. I only saw a couple of worm-eaten dugouts all the time I was here. Seems that most of the Kanakas fish from the rocks on the other coast."

"H'm. . . . Well, well, I wonder where Kambiera is? Get the whaleboat launched, Mulvaney. Better arm the seamen. Got your guns, you two?"

Peterson and Collins nodded, pulling aside their jackets to show .38 revolvers strapped in holsters round their waists. Orville himself carried a little .25 Colt in his hip pocket. He was more likely to use brains than lead, unless the latter were absolutely necessary. And he could always find other men to do the shooting for him.

"Good," he grunted. "We'll go ashore and look up this village you spoke of, Peterson."

The *Sea Bird* had dropped anchor early in the morning, and the chill mist, swirling away as the sun rose, exposed the whole island, hilly in the center, thickly vegetated, and a riot of life, animal but not human. Not a native appeared with the arrival of the *Sea Bird*. Orville took the precaution of slipping half a dozen spare clips of cartridges into his jacket pocket, so much did that impress him.

The whaleboat pulled ashore and the three men stepped out. The boat pulled off into the shallows, outside the break of the swell, and waited, since in case of an attack those ashore would probably have to make a sudden dash for the schooner. Peterson led the way past the charred and crumbled storehouse, straight for the palm fringe to where the head of a narrow well-beaten path showed. Orville stopped for a moment by the blackened ruins and grunted.

"Did McGraw fight?" he asked suddenly as he followed Peterson up the beach.

"Don't know," said Peterson, "I think they must have got him while he was asleep. I never found any bodies other than those of the house boys."

"Huh! Man must be crazy t' get caught asleep in a place like this. He oughta known it was dangerous. Blasted fool! Hope he's still alive."

"M'm, doubtful. If I'd thought he still was I'd have had a shot to get him back."

Orville grunted. "H'm, suppose that's so."

"Whereabouts were you bush-whacked?" inquired Collins with interest, fingering the butt of his revolver and shooting glances at the sullen wall of vegetation that lined the beach.

Peterson waved a great hand down the path they were just entering.

"About a hundred yards from the beach this way," he said.

"Then keep a lookout," Orville snarled. "I don't want to get bush-whacked till I've seen this Kambiera bird."

"And I don't want to get bush-whacked at all," grumbled Collins, slightly nervous because there were no signs of natives. "The Kanakas must be planning something."

"Maybe," admitted Peterson, and went forward without saying any more. His keen eyes searched the path ahead carefully. Orville, who came next, about a dozen paces behind, was snarling to himself and glaring at the ground as he trotted along, apparently oblivious to danger, plucking at his wisp of mustache. Collins brought up the rear, about a dozen paces behind Orville.

But nothing happened. Two hundred yards down the path from the beach brought the three men to the village Peterson had visited before, on his return from Bangatang, to get information regarding the disappearance of McGraw.

On the appearance of the white men the few men and women lolling on the ground before the pile-raised huts rose quickly to their feet and uttered sharp cries, hardly of fear, more perhaps of warning. Other natives appeared, pouring from the huts or crowding in from the taro and yam patches behind the village, until a crowd of perhaps a hundred had assembled.

Peterson addressed a little wizened old man with coal-black eyes and a good covering of dirt and wrinkles all over his well-nigh naked body. From the deference paid him by the other natives, who refrained from touching him or jostling him, it was evident he was a chief.

"You savvy this is big white fella," said Peterson in the New Britain tongue and in his deepest voice, waving a hand toward Orville, who had lifted his head and was glaring at the little chief. "He alla same very angry with Kambiera. Kambiera takum this big chief's white slave from his house. Where Kambiera now?"

"KAMBIERA in the hills," the old chief replied sulkily. "Kambiera take white man because he want him. That is nothing to us. We did not burn the house on the beach. Also we did not touch the white man."

"H'm! Who the hell are you?" Orville snarled, suddenly drawing all eyes on himself.

"I am chief here," the old man returned insolently. "Also I am full brother to Kambiera. Also I do not like white men, and my young warriors are eager for heads." There was a threat in his voice. Yet he was afraid.

"Huh! Is that so? That explains matters a bit. Where's the chief named Touri? I bought ten acres of beach land off of him to build a trading station on. Suva verified the deal. . . . Hyde, the supercargo of the *Lizzie R.*, pulled the deal for me, Peterson, about three years back."

"Touri? He die long time. Kambiera cut off him head." The insolence of the old chief was becoming more apparent. He added after a pause: "Kambiera big chief of Selapiu. It is the law that no white men shall live here. Kambiera, he says he drive them into the sea."

"Damn his eyes! I'd like to see him drive me anywhere! Skunk! I'm staying here now I've got that ten acres. Is that clear? I'll stay if the blasted island rains Kambieras. Understand?"

The old chief did not understand, but he caught the drift of Orville's indignation and his black eyes glistened. There had been much wealth accruing to those who had raided and burned the house of the other white men. Kambiera might decide to raid this white man's house and ship, and so there would be much more wealth. But the secret fear that was in the chief restrained him.

Collins stepped forward with a sudden exclamation and reached for a dull metal ornament the savage wore round his neck on a string of coconut fiber. It chanced that one of the old chief's taboos was that he should not be touched by a man with a beard, and a murmur went up from the surrounding throng as Collins made his movement and the old chief stepped hastily back. Also some of the younger men began to crowd closer together and to push the women into the background out of the way. Peterson half drew his gun.

"What is it?" Orville asked testily of Collins, who was gaping at the metal ornament which the old savage had half hidden with his hand in indignation and fear.

"That dirty little swine's wearing McGraw's watch-charm," the trader said hoarsely. "It's an elk's head in bronze."

"Huh! Is that so?" Orville snorted. He peered forward and the chief made another furtive movement to cover the charm.

"Where did you get that!" Orville demanded. McGraw must be dead if the natives were wearing his personal effects.

But the old savage made no answer. He was evidently tired of being questioned. He turned with a grimace of dislike and the crowd behind opened to give him a clear passage through.

Peterson nudged the little millionaire's arm.

"I see most of the men are wearing things from the store. That bird over there's got a china plate fastened round his arm. See it? There's another with a loaded Winchester cartridge in his ear. Plenty of 'em. If these boys didn't kill McGraw they sure helped to loot the station."

Orville snarled and glared at the murmuring natives.

"If the white man is delivered to me alive," he said loudly, "I will give one full case of tobacco to the man who brings him. Also will I give many fathoms of cloth and many mirrors and beads and axes. I will make that man rich and will feed him on canned salmon for many days."

The old chief turned back at that and came toward Orville again. He sneered and gave a sort of half grin. He overcame his secret fear enough to boast.

"It is the custom of Selapiu for Kambiera to take what he wants," he said. "Also the white man is dead and his head rests in the devil-devil house of Kambiera in the hills where no white man shall go."

"Don't be too cocky, m' son. I've been to a good many places before, no one was ever going to. Understand this, you unwashed heathen! If McGraw's dead then Kambiera shall die too. Savvy? If you deliver the old blighter to me I'll give you——"

The chief spat on the ground at Orville's feet.

"We are of one blood, Kambiera and I, and my young men standing around are of his blood also. Shall we deliver our kinsman to you? His glory is our glory. Also we do not want white men on Selapiu, except to bring us tobacco maybe once a year."

"'Bout turn, Peterson," snapped Orville suddenly. "We go to the ship."

Peterson made his way obediently along the path, followed by Collins and Orville, the latter backing off from the natives and not turning round till he was out of spear shot. From the threatening looks flung after him and the angry mutterings among the younger and hotter-headed men it was evident he had succeeded in making himself very unpopular.

No attempt was made to bush-whack the party on their way back to the schooner. Probably Peterson had done too much damage the last time. Or perhaps the thing that made the old chief afraid to attack in the first place weighed too heavily on his mind. And Kambiera must be consulted too. Signal fires were already smoking vigorously by the time the three white men tumbled into the waiting whaleboat and were rowed out to the anchored *Sea Bird*.

"Get the stores ashore," ordered Orville as soon as he hit the deck over the low rail. He did not intend to waste any time founding his new station. And to Peterson: "You better go with them. Take Collins and four seamen and some carbines. When you get the stuff stacked draw off lines for a new trading house. We'll start building at once. Is that clear? Good!"

Mopping his heated brow with a limp white silk handkerchief, the little millionaire jog-trotted along the deck to the poop and called for the steward, who, without waiting to be told, brought a bottle of whisky, one of soda-water, and a glass.

AN HOUR later a native slunk from the palm fringe to the water's edge, where the first boatload of stores was being landed, and pulled at Peterson's sleeve.

"I want to see big white chief," the man whined with a fearful glance round at the jungle behind him.

"You'll have to wait till I get this stuff ashore," grunted Peterson, shaking off the man's greasy hand. "You can come in the boat then."

"No wait," the man persisted.

He shot a quick look at the schooner and the intervening sea, and then with a quick run was among the breakers. His brown arms could be seen flashing in the sun as he lifted them and drove himself forward.

The native clambered up the anchor cable, over the cat-head, and so on to the foredeck. The Samoan seamen on board were busy hoisting stores out of the main hatch and the man actually managed to get to the break of the poop before he was seen. Then Captain Mulvaney, twisting his yellow mustache with great ferocity as he glowered on his sweating seamen, caught a glimpse of the slinking islander.

"Hi! What name stop along you?" he demanded.

"Kaweing name stop along me," the man whined, crouching a little. He was unarmed and naked but for a breech clout of tapa-cloth. "Want see big white chief," he added.

"What the hell for?"

"See big white chief about white man."

"White man, huh? Ho, Mr. Orville!" the captain bawled to the little millionaire, dozing in a long cane chair on the poop itself, under the thick sun-shielding awnings.

Orville awoke with a start.

"What is it?" he grumbled.

"Nigger here wants to see you about a white man," the captain bawled on.

"What white man?"

"Hi, you fella boy! What white man?"

"Talk about white man Kambiera take."

"Mother of God! Come here, Orville—here's some dope on McGraw."

The little millionaire snarled and trotted along the poop. He came down the companion to the after deck with deliberation and many grunts.

"Well, well, what is it?" he said testily.

Captain Mulvaney explained again.

"You know where white man is?" Orville demanded suddenly.

The native nodded. "You say one full case of tobacco, many fathoms of cloth and many beads and mirrors and axes." He began licking his lips.

"You shall have the blasted lot if you give me dope that'll bring me Kambiera or McGraw," Orville promised.

"But now?" the man persisted.

Orville grunted an order to Holt, the mate, who stood near by, and he went away, to return with half a dozen sticks of tobacco and a shiny, metal-framed mirror. Orville handed the stuff to the native, whose eyes glistened as he took it. He sniffed at the tobacco, looked at his reflection in the mirror with queer animal-like gurgles of delight, and then talked.

"Kambiera, he take white man to the hills to teach him to shoot white man guns he get from house. White man him make Kambiera strong and clever so that he fight all islands and rule them. White man live in the hills until he teach Kambiera to shoot guns."

"Huh? McGraw's alive! Good. But it complicates matters, damn it!"

"Supposing McGraw won't teach Kambiera?" asked Mulvaney.

The native grinned. "Then Kambiera cut him up slowly."

"And if he does teach him, what happens after?"

"Then Kambiera eat him," the native responded simply, and fell to crooning over his mirror.

"I'll have McGraw out of this before nightfall. Now, you fella boy, you savvy this. You find Kambiera tell him I want my white man back before sun he go down. Is that clear?"

"You not tell Kambiera I tell you?"

"Not a word. . . . Give him a dozen more sticks of tobacco, Holt. Then send him ashore. . . . Get the dory launched, Mulvaney. I'm going ashore again."

"Taking the nigger with you, sir?"

"I'm not. How do you get that way? Let him swim. That's how he came."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Orville snorted and trotted away to get another drink while the dory was being unlashed from the butt of the mainmast and lowered overside. Then he went ashore and cursed Peterson fervently for not raising an awning first to cover the stores After that, feeling better, he called Peterson and the four Samoan seamen to follow him down the path to the village, leaving the two armed men who had brought the dory ashore to watch the stores.

ORVILLE found the village buzzing like a beehive. The natives were all swarming round a large hut in the center and listening with many interruptions to a stout, flabby man of immense proportions who stood on a tree-stump and waved his arms and dripped sweat very energetically over those near him. Catching sight of the two white men and the rifle-armed Samoans behind them as they entered the clearing where the huts stood, the fat man stopped talking abruptly and remained on his stump, moving uneasily about and lowering his arms slowly to his side. He gaped and a look of fear crossed his fat face. There was a moment's silence and then the natives all turned their heads to see what had startled and checked the orator. A deep, long-drawn "Ooh!" ran around.

Standing perhaps half a dozen feet from the outmost fringe of the native audience, Orville stabbed a bony forefinger at the orator as a sudden inspiration came to him.

"Are you Kambiera?" he snarled.

There was no reply but the man's actions indicated an affirmative answer. He dropped suddenly from his tree-stump, grabbed up a couple of spears and a glaringly new Winchester, and with a dozen or more young warriors behind him disappeared into the bush. The reason he did not attack, Orville learnt later. And it was the reason for the changed attitudes of the natives since Peterson's fight. A French cruiser had blown up some fifty men and burnt half a dozen villages on a neighboring island some weeks before as punishment for the killing of a trader. That was after the abduction of McGraw and the looting of his station.

The news, running swiftly by some mysterious method all over the Bismarcks, had set up within Kambiera, the would-be Napoleon, and in all the chiefs of Selapiu, a stir of uneasiness and alarm. Kambiera did not want to have half a dozen of his villages burnt. He thought he was fairly safe in the hills and when once his warriors, with the aid of the captured white man, knew how to shoot the rifles he had looted, he was sure he would be able to defy even a cruiser. But the time was not yet ripe. So he fled from Orville instead of attacking him. Fifty dead men and burnt villages spoke a language Kambiera and the other chiefs could understand. They viewed white men now in a different light, though still with some contempt.

"So that's Kambiera," Orville snarled, glaring round on the mob of natives. He spotted the old chief who had declared himself full brother to the big hill chief.

"Come here!" he called testily. The old native came forward rather unwillingly, a flock of hostile and sullen young men at his heels.

"Are all these relations of yours?" the little millionaire demanded, waving round at the young men.

"They are my sons," the old chief nodded and mumbled.

"Good, they'll do. . . . Peterson," he said in English, "take three of the seamen and get behind this bunch. I want them on the beach. Shoot if necessary. . . . You"—he turned to the remaining seaman behind him—"keep this gang covered."

Before the natives could comprehend fully what was being done the group round the old chief was surrounded and threatened by the guns of Peterson and the three seamen. Having had experience during the capture of McGraw in the ways of rifle bullets, they made no great show of resistance. One young man did start to raise the short spear he carried but Peterson shot him neatly through the wrist. That precipitated matters. The free natives dived for spears and clubs while Orville and his party hustled the bewildered captives along the path to the beach. A wail rose from the village.

"Quick!" Orville snapped. "Get 'em to the shore!"

With much prodding the fifteen captured natives were made to start along, looking wildly round for a chance to escape from under the gun muzzles. Three actually got away in the bush to either side, and one of the Samoan seamen shot another while he was trying. That settled affairs. The eleven who were left made no further resistance but trotted out to the beach and lined up fearfully, under the directions of the little millionaire, near the trade goods piled on the sand. The island was dotted with signal fires by that time.

A mob started to pour from the head of the path from the village on to the beach, but a few shots sent them scuttling to cover again. They dared not fling their spears for fear of hitting their own relatives, who were uttering querulous cries and getting more and more panic-stricken.

"YOU savvy this," Orville snarled at them, wagging a bony forefinger. "You savvy this, m'sons. You can't cut up white men when you feel like it. Is that clear? And I'm keeping you in place of my white man. How long does it take to get word to Kambiera? You, you old heathen!" He pointed to the chief.

"Half an hour," the old man mumbled.

"That makes one hour there and back. Good. You can send one of these young men to Kambiera to tell him that unless he has my white man on the beach here within one hour, I'm going to start shooting his relations and his blood brethren. Is that clear? After one hour is up I'm shooting a man every ten minutes. Savvy?"

The old chief gave a great start and gazed blankly at Orville. He did not doubt the white man would carry out his threat. He remembered the French cruiser. But it was a question whether Kambiera thought enough of his relatives to release McGraw for their sake. If he didn't the villagers would bring pressure to bear, for they surely had no inclination to lose their best young men. Yet the old savage tried a little bluff.

"But the white man is dead," he muttered, avoiding his sons' eyes.

Orville snarled. "I know different. He stands by my side within one hour or your sons die first and then you. Now send a messenger."

For a long time there was silence. The old chief thought and looked back at the palms, looked along the empty beach, looked at the anchored *Sea Bird*, finally looked from the leveled rifles of the Samoan seamen into the eyes of Orville. And he knew he had heard aright.

Rapidly he spoke to a young warrior by his side and, with a sharp intake of his breath, thankful that he at least was going to escape, the man shot away toward the path that led to the village. Orville grunted and sat down to wait on a packing case full of cotton print, and laid his watch on the case beside him. He did not think he would have to shoot any one, for the natives of Melanesia are notoriously clannish, sticking to those of their own particular family through thick and thin.

Peterson sat beside Orville after a while and said to him in a low tone:

"Will you actually shoot if McGraw doesn't show up?"

"I've got to," grunted Orville. "It's no use saying you'll do a thing in these parts unless you do. You've got to show 'em you're as careless of life as they are. Believe me, there'll be no more wiping out of stations along this part of the island for many years to come, by the time I leave here. Method's drastic but effective. Send Collins aboard in the dory to get a bottle of whisky and some soda water."

Peterson grunted and frowned and shook his head and then moved across to Collins and gave him Orville's order. The trader got into the dory and rowed aboard. From the head of the path leading to the village the free natives watched and glared and fingered the spears they dared not throw.

"Just think of McGraw up in those blasted hills all the time," snorted Orville, as Collins returned with the whisky and the three white men took a drink. "Perhaps Kambiera's even been cutting him up like the Kanaka said. God help 'em all if they've even touched my trader!"

At last Orville rose to his feet from the packing case and after another glance at his watch addressed the old chief, who began to sweat with fear. As his had been the hand that had cut the head from one of McGraw's Samoan house boys, he felt particularly guilty.

"Time's up," Orville snarled. "Seems your full brother doesn't intend to give up his white man."

Just then the young warrior who had been sent with the message to Kambiera, appeared at the head of the village path and, not caring to come nearer, shouted something to his father.

The old chief swayed a little and mumbled and went a little gray. Kambiera had defied the white men. Also he had threatened that if one of his relations were shot he would kill McGraw.

Orville started at this. He turned rapidly and paced up and down for a few moments. The decision was his to make and he was a survivor from iron days. Peterson fidgeted uncomfortably and Collins went white. Then Orville snorted. He spoke to the old chief, who was watching him apprehensively, and with a glimmer of derision in his eyes, thinking Kambiera had won.

"TELL your messenger, chief, that while he has but one man to kill I have eleven. And I can get more. Tell him!"

Falteringly the old man shouted out the message. Then Orville walked to the end of the line of nervous natives, pulled out his automatic and very calmly shot the end man in the shoulder. The native screamed and fell to his knees, clutching at his wound, while the other natives moaned and shivered slightly. From the path head went up a wail and the old chief near Orville shouted another message with suddenly revived energy. The messenger who had been to

Kambiera before was seen to double into the palms and disappear. Orville grunted and sat down on the packing-case again.

"Ten minutes, chief," he snarled. "I'm shooting a man every ten minutes. And if at the end of one hour more my white man is not here, I shoot to *kill*. Is that clear? Peterson, go over and stop that man's moaning. Give him a drink and then bind up his wound. He's only shot in the fleshy part of the shoulder."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Peterson, and went to the now prostrate native.

Collins took a step toward the little millionaire.

"You can't go on—on shooting 'em, sir," he said shakily. "Not in cold blood."

"Huh? Can't I? Just stay here and watch me. Ever heard it said a man to train a dog has only need to thrash it once? If he makes that thrashing a good one he need never thrash again. Same here! Cannibals! Look at 'em! Every man of them! They killed the houseboys, they've got McGraw, probably torturing him. I'm backing this bush-whacking stuff off the map of Selapiu. Is that clear? Then shut up! Take another drink if you feel shaky."

Ten minutes passed and there was no sign of McGraw. Just as deliberately as before Orville shot another man. The old chief frantically shouted orders for messengers to go to Kambiera and demand the white man, and a fresh commotion was to be noticed at the head of the village path. Orville grunted, took another drink, and sat on the packing-case again.

When the fifth man had been shot the old chief was well-nigh dead with terror. His shouts were continuous and loud. He cursed his full brother Kambiera's mad ambition to learn to fire the white man's rifles, and he cursed the day he had aided in the wiping out of the house and store on the beach. All of which did no good. Far in the hills Kambiera was receiving a messenger nearly every ten minutes and was getting more and more apprehensive. From the reports given him he began to believe the coast village would be half depopulated before nightfall. Men clamored at his hut door. He thought of killing McGraw, who lay bound hand and foot in a stinking devil-devil house, but the memory of what the French cruiser had done some weeks before stopped the chief. He weakened as each new messenger reached him.

FROM the head of the path that led to the village a grotesque figure staggered, still bound as to the arms. It tottered weakly, uttering strange cries, across the burning sand and toward the group of white and brown men near the pile of stores under the low awning.

Orville glanced up from his half-filled glass and suppressed a mutter of horror. Then he cried: "Fetch him, Peterson. Look out for spears!"

With a shudder Peterson went to bring what was left of McGraw, his co-trader on Selapiu. He caught him gently in his arms and carried him to Orville, while the old chief pleaded that now the white man had been returned he and his sons be let go.

Orville shook his head and motioned the Samoans to keep their guns leveled. "I may want Kambiera," he said grimly.

A shiver went through the chief.

"There it—he is, sir," said Peterson hoarsely, and he laid McGraw at Orville's feet and cut his bonds.

The trader's eyes were sunk so deep in his head as to be almost out of sight. Kambiera had treated him roughly on his refusal to show the method of handling rifles to the young men.

Kambiera had used persuasion. The trader could not tell what things had been done, for his tongue was gone. Also his fingers were gone, or rather all of them except the index, which Kambiera had decided McGraw would need if he yielded to pressure. The trader's toes had been first to go and his lower limbs were frightfully scarred with the blisters from glowing wood splinters. Other and quite unspeakable things had been done. The shock of seeing Orville's face bending over him proved too much. He tried to smile, clawed upward with ghastly hands, and died as the little millionaire shook his wrist in greeting.

When Orville looked up he no longer saw horror at the shootings on the faces of Collins and Peterson. He saw two grim-lipped men who only wanted the chance to kill and to kill for as long as their arms would swing. He allowed himself a grim smile. He was old in sights of horror. Then he turned to the nervous old chief.

"I want Kambiera," he said distinctly.

The chief made no answer, but moved uneasily.

"Or you die," added Orville.

The chief protested, his voice rising.

"But Kambiera will not come to you."

"Your people must fetch him."

Hastily the chief turned and shouted to his villagers at the head of the path. There was silence for a long time. Then a single piping voice spoke out. The old chief answered. He pleaded. The single voice was the voice of his eldest son, who had not been captured with his brothers, and was his father's favorite. The chief turned to Orville at last.

"There will be war," he said, shakily, "but my son will bring you Kambiera. And then I go free?"

"And then you go free. And you go with your lesson." Orville waved grimly to the wounded young men on the ground, and the chief lowered his eyes and nodded. He was not likely to commit the indiscretion of attacking a trading station again.

Orville waited nearly an hour, sitting on the packing-case while the sun began to sink low in the sky. He hardly moved all the time, glancing down on the dead body that had once been McGraw. Peterson and Collins stood near him, rigid as statues. And as rigid and as alert stood the Samoan seamen covering the still standing natives round the old chief.

And then Kambiera came. He did not come willingly. He was thrust out on the beach, his arms bound, gashed about the face and shoulders, two young men prodding him with spears from behind. Orville learned afterward that the old chief's son, nearly frantic at his father's danger, had got together a party of half a dozen young men and had made a swift trip to the hills, kidnaping the sullen and unsuspecting Kambiera, and racing to the coast with him, two of their number fighting a dogged rear-guard action with Kambiera's people.

The old chief lifted his head and glared at the man who had been the cause of so many of his sons being shot. Then he said, his voice trembling with rage:

"Dog!"

Kambiera did not answer, but his face was ghastly and his eyes shiny with fear. The two young men prodding him on left him when he was near the pile of stores and the low awning and retreated to the palms. Kambiera looked desperately after them.

Orville sighed and suddenly stood up. He glared at Kambiera. It was the fat man who had made the speech.

"For every white man dead a chief must die," he said slowly.

Kambiera shook all over, like a jellyfish.

"O white man," he began, licking his dry lips.

"Shut up!" Orville snarled. "Peterson, put him in the dory and take him to the *Sea Bird*. Collins, you stay here and watch the stores tonight. Shoot at any movement after dark. Is that clear? Let the Kanakas go. They can carry their wounded. Vamoose, you!"

WITH a sigh of relief the old chief motioned to his remaining unwounded sons to pick up their brothers, and made hastily for the path that led to the village, where a host of his people poured out to welcome him, and had to turn immediately afterward to beat back a war party of Kambiera's men who had come to get back their chief. Peterson took Kambiera to the *Sea Bird* and stood guard over him.

Orville motioned to two of the Samoans to put aside their rifles and lift the contorted, maimed body of McGraw. He had them carry it almost to the palm fringe and set them to work to dig a grave. Then he buried McGraw, quoting over him the service he remembered so well from past burials. After that, with his own hands, he made a rough cross from pieces of packing-case and stuck it at the grave head. Later he would send a properly carved stone from Apia. He returned to the ship, breathing hard on his mustache. And exactly half an hour later the body of Kambiera, chief of the islanders and especially of the hill people of Selapiu, swung from the main rigging of the *Sea Bird*.

"Tomorrow," snarled Orville, after witnessing the hanging and noting that many natives ashore were witnessing it too, "tomorrow we build a new trading station that shall stay and flourish and shall be safe. Is that clear? Now let's have a drink. You have seen today, Peterson, how we tamed the Islands in the past."

And Peterson, following his employer into the saloon, nodded and grunted that it was so.

A Novel of America's Future

The Wrath *to* Come

Without an Ally, the United States Is Menaced With War by the Unscrupulous Governments of Two Powerful Nations—and Doesn't Realize It. Can the Country Be Aroused in Time to Face the Danger?

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Illustrations by Harley E. Stivers

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

FOR a long time, or so it seemed—it could, in fact, have been a matter of moments only—Grant Slattery stared at the woman who had appeared so amazingly and fainted before him. He had been, so far as he knew, alone, save for his crew, on his yacht, bound from Monaco for New York. And now, in the middle of the night, there came to him Gertrude, the Princess von Diss, the woman whom he had loved, and by whom, three years before, he had been jilted.

She was clad in the magnificent garments, now water-stained and ruined, that she had worn the night before, at Cornelius Blum's great dinner at Monte Carlo. And the sight of her, alarming him, appalling him, set his mind to a frantic exploration of all that had led up to her coming.

Slattery was not what most people thought him—a rich and idle young American. He was, more than thirty years after the forming of the Pact of Nations had abolished war and intrigue, engaged, as an unofficial agent of his country, in trying to uncover a dangerous and sinister conspiracy directed against her by Germany, Japan and Russia—which, though bound by the Pact, so far as member nations were concerned, were free to pick a quarrel with and fight America.

In Monte Carlo, owing to the meeting of the Pact of Nations at Nice, the conspirators had gathered. Cornelius Blum, the arch magnate of industrial Germany; von Diss, Gertrude's jealous husband; Itash, of the Japanese service; they had all been there. Working with Lord Yeovil, the British Prime Minister, Grant had been able, by a trick, to prevent the defeat of Yeovil's plan to induce the Pact once more to invite America to join—a move which would result in the defeat of the plot. He was on his way home, now, to take his part in overcoming America's traditional unwillingness to join the Pact or any other alliance or league.

And he had gone, hoping, as he said farewell to Lady Susan Yeovil, as, despite her readiness to meet him, he had, remembering her youth, refrained from asking her to be his wife, that when he returned, when she could have had a chance to see a little more of life, she would heal the wound that Gertrude von Diss's faithlessness had dealt him. And now—here was Gertrude, maddened, perhaps by her old love for him, revived and strengthened, goaded by her husband's brutality! He could never explain; Susan would hate him; he would be ruined—discredited.

Gertrude's eyes opened. She smiled wistfully.

"If you please, Grant," she said, "I want my clothes."

His words, even to himself, sounded pitifully inadquate.

"How on earth did you get here?" he asked.

"It was rather difficult," she admitted. "I had a lot of luck. Can I have some coffee, or something? I haven't had anything since I came on board."

"When was that?" he asked.

"Four o'clock yesterday morning. I'm starving. I was afraid you'd hear me crying in the night."

"Good God!" he groaned. "Come down to my room. You mustn't let them see you like this."

SHE followed him down to his own quarters. He shut the door, watched her sink into a chair, and stood over her.

"Tell me about it," he said, simply.

"After we got home," she began, "—and they made me play roulette until two o'clock—Otto was simply brutal. I couldn't bear it any longer, and the thought of your going. I gambled once before in life, you see. I gambled again. I gave Ottilie, my maid, all the money I had. She packed my trunk for me and addressed it to you. It came on board with a lot of other things. It must be somewhere about. That was easy enough. The difficulty was to get here myself. I borrowed a chauffeur's overcoat, put it on over all my things, and a cap that hid my face. I walked up and down the docks for an hour, until I saw a chance. Then I came down the gangway, slipped along the empty side of the deck, got down the companionway—I had to hide twice behind doors—but eventually I got to the door of the stateroom which you said you kept for all special guests, and which I knew wasn't to be used this voyage.

"I crawled in, locked the door, and lay down. I hid there and waited. It must have been about four or five o'clock yesterday morning. I heard all the people come on with stores. I heard Lord Yeovil come on board. I heard your voice as you walked up and down with him. All the time I lay there in terror. Then I heard the rush of the water and the anchor come up. I heard the engines and knew we were out at sea. Still I dared not show myself. I was afraid."

"Afraid!" he repeated mechanically.

"I was afraid you'd send me back. I knew there was only one chance—to stay on board long enough. I hid all day, terrified lest some one should look in the stateroom. At night I felt so ill that I almost gave up, but somehow or other I dropped off to sleep. When I awoke I felt faint and I found myself crying. I went to sleep again, though. This morning, as soon as I heard your voice, on deck, I crept up the stairs, and here I am. I am here, Grant. You are not going to be cruel?"

He rang the bell.

"Some coffee, an omelet quickly," he ordered from the astonished steward. "Serve it here. Let me have the coffee at once."

"Don't keep me alive unless you are going to be kind to me," she begged hysterically. "I couldn't bear it, Grant. Tell me you are not going to land me anywhere. Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I was thinking," he answered.

"Grant, you cared for me once," she went on. "I know I must look perfectly hateful now, but I'm not hateful. I'm really wonderful. I could be. Otto was killing me, and all the horrible things he made me do! Grant, say something to me. Feel my hands, how cold they are. Be kind to me."

"My dear, who could be anything but kind to you?" he exclaimed. "But you must realize—you must know—this is a terrible thing you have done."

He took her hands and held them in his for a minute. The steward brought in the coffee. The boy followed behind, a moment or two later, with an omelet and cold meats. Grant felt suddenly stifled. He turned toward the door.

"I'm going to leave you for a short time," he announced. "You must drink your coffee and you must eat something. I'm going to try and find out where your things are. I will have them put in a room for you and a bath got ready. We can't talk until you are yourself again."

She looked at him wistfully.

"I'll do just as you tell me, Grant," she promised.

"Then first of all, drink your coffee while it is hot," he insisted.

HE MADE his way to the deck. For a moment he could scarcely realize that this was the same cruise, the same ship, the same deck he had walked a few moments ago. He tried to face the matter calmly. She had been on board since the night after Blum's party, the remainder of that early morning, and all the next night. By this time every one in Monte Carlo probably knew—probably Susan knew. No one would ever believe the truth. No one could ever be told the truth. There was no explanation, no defense. She was there alone on the yacht with him. Before they could land anywhere, two nights would have passed. A sudden storm of anger seized him. Then he remembered her, as she had almost crouched in her chair, her gorgeous clothes bedraggled, her eyes searching his like the haunted eyes of a dumb animal in fear. What way was there out of it? He had faced problems before, difficult problems. How could he deal with this one?

Presently he returned to his quarters, and sent for his own servant.

"Brooks," he asked, "did you know anything about a lady being on board?"

"Nothing, sir, until a few minutes ago when I saw her coming up the companionway," the man assured him.

"Have you heard any one else allude to it in any way?"

"No one, sir."

"It appears that she sent a trunk here, or a package, addressed to me, containing her clothes," Grant continued, after a moment's pause. "Kindly search for it, and have it taken to the Empire suite aft. Prepare a bath there and everything that is necessary. Find the lady and let her know. She will lunch with me in the saloon."

"Very good, sir," the man replied.

And after that! He busied himself an hour or so in the minor affairs of the ship. The captain found him studying the chart.

"When should we make Gibraltar, Martin?" he inquired.

"Sunday morning, sir, as early as you like."

Grant nodded. "I may decide to put in," he said; "I'll let you know."

Gibraltar. A hopeless place. How could he possibly leave her there among strangers? And yet, if not, it must be Madeira, worse still, or New York. Eight days alone with the woman with whom he had once been in love—the memory of whose kisses had never altogether passed. It all seemed hopeless. His own marked attentions to Gertrude during the last week or so—attentions persisted in partly to lull her suspicions and partly to keep her away from Arthur Lymane—came back to his mind. There was probably not a soul in the world who would hold him blameless for what had happened. A diabolical trick of Fate!

He came down the deck a few minutes before lunch-time and found Gertrude established in a long chair—a changed and revived Gertrude. She was wearing a white serge costume; her hair shone in the warm light with the color of cowslips in a sun-soaked meadow. She was herself again, as perfect in the small details of her toilet as though her maid had spent the morning by her side. Brooks appeared with two cocktails on a tray, just as Grant arrived. She took one readily and smiled at her host.

"This is wonderful," she murmured. "I never wanted anything so much in my life. The epoch to which my reputation belongs is finished," she went on, a moment or two later. "You can put me off somewhere if you want to and make me appear ridiculous. I do not think that you will be so cruel as that, though."

"No," he admitted, "I do not think I shall. But, in the name of God, what made you do it?"

"I have tried to explain," she answered. "Perhaps presently I may be more coherent. Am I allowed to lunch with you?"

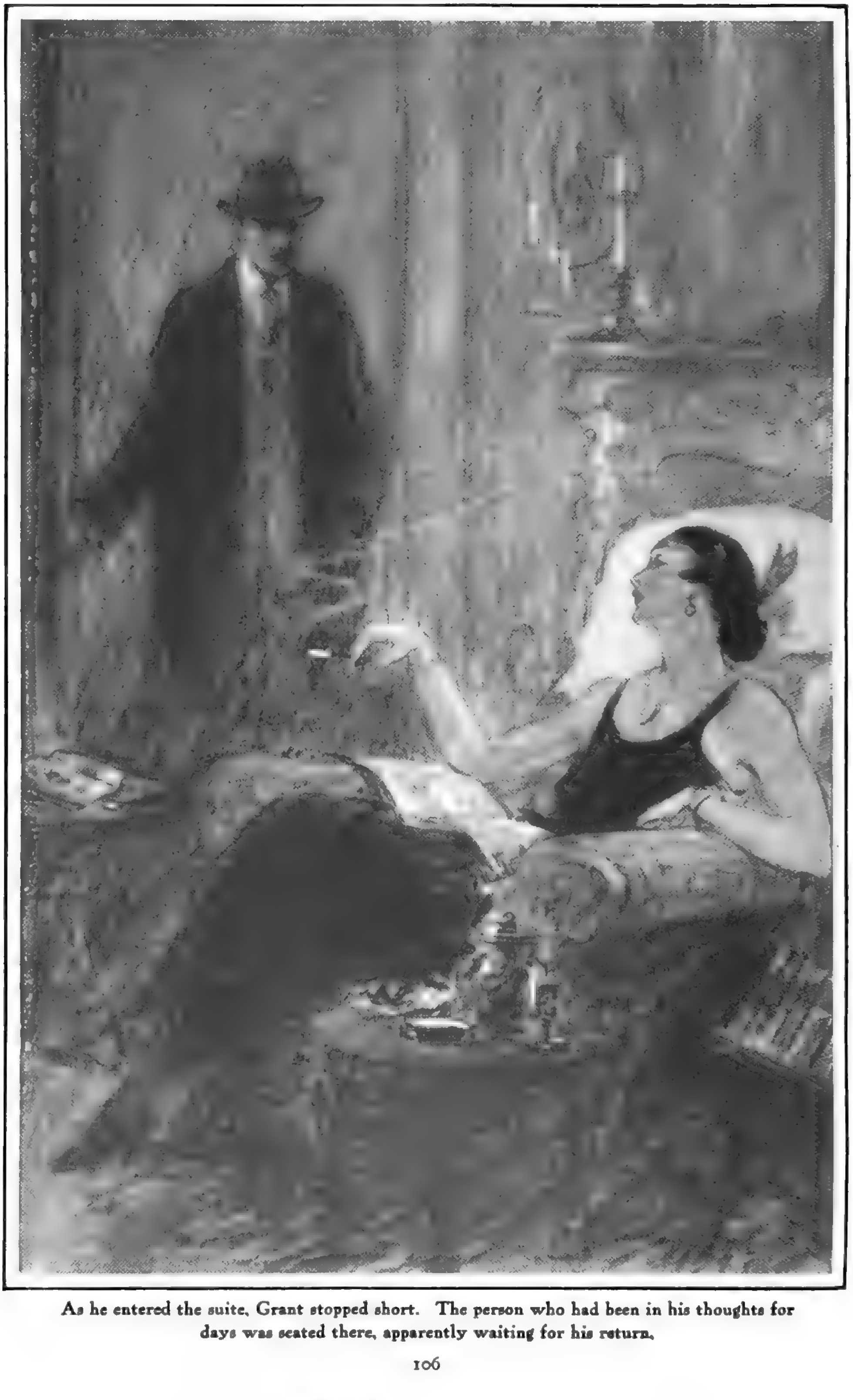
"By all means. The bugle has just gone. Let me help you out."

Her fingers clung to his, and she took his arm as they passed down the companionway and entered the beautiful little saloon.

"I didn't think I should be here again so soon," she murmured.

"Neither did I," he answered.

"I missed most of the fun the other night," she went on, ruminatingly. "If I had known what was going to happen, I shouldn't have been so careful. Your little friend Lady Susan really won the trick, didn't she?"



As he entered the suite, Grant stopped short. The person who had been in his thoughts for days was seated there, apparently waiting for his return.

"SHE did," Grant assented. "She brought that youthful navigator of mine to his senses. I think if it hadn't been for her, your husband and Blum would have got Funderstrom back and that invitation to America would never have been sent."

"In which case, I suppose, you would not have been on your way to America now?"

"I certainly should not," he acknowledged.

"And you would have been spared this terrible thing which has come upon you!"

"The voyage would never have taken place," he remarked stonily.

"To leave our unimportant selves for a moment or two," she said, as they took their coffee on deck, "what are you going to do in America?"

"I shall find work there," he answered.

"You certainly will," she agreed. "I believe you are going back with the right idea. If not, you can hear it from me. All that speech of Blum's was sheer and unadulterated bluff. Germany will do its very utmost in the States to get the Senate to refuse the invitation from the Pact. They have more power than you would imagine."

"You have reason to believe this?" Grant asked.

"I know it," she assured him. "They talked before me freely enough—Blum, Lutrecht, Otto. I was only Otto's wife, his chattel. I didn't count. I shouldn't be likely to dare to breathe a word of which my lord and master did not approve. Oh, they are fools, those men, the way they treat their women!"

"Have you any idea as to the means they intend to use?" Grant asked.

"Propaganda, first and foremost," she declared. "They are all prepared. Whom they cannot convince, they will buy. They reckon that the bill for assenting to the invitation will be fought inch by inch in the Senate. They will go any lengths to stop it."

Grant's face darkened. "I know what that means," he muttered. "I know what a political fight in my country means, also!"

"I might be able to help," she suggested a little timidly. "I have seen something of life in Berlin."

He made her drink her coffee, and afterward lie down and rest. He himself spent a restless afternoon. The situation tormented him. A man of fixed and changeless purposes, as a rule, he found himself all the time looking at the matter from varying points of view. There were moments when his old feeling for Gertrude seemed to some extent revived, when, for the sake of bringing the happiness once more into her face, he felt a queer incoherent impulse to bid her close the gate of memory upon her past, to assure her of his unchanged devotion. And then he shook with terror at the thought that such an idea could possibly have occurred to him.

He was running a risk of ruining his own life and perhaps Susan's for the sake of a sentimental impulse of pity. He kept to himself most of the afternoon. At dinner time the strain began again. She wore a simple but beautifully fitting black net gown, and the way her eyes sought his as though for his approval would have seemed pathetic to a harder-hearted man than Grant. She drank more champagne than usual and regained some of her spirits. She seemed less timid; some of her constraint appeared to pass. Afterward they sat out on deck in a sheltered place. A clear, windy night—a star-strewn sky—a moon in its last quarter! They smoked, drank coffee, and every moment conversation became more difficult. Suddenly she leaned toward him and caught at his hands.

"Grant!" she murmured, pleading. "Can't you pretend, even if you don't feel anything any more? Don't keep me at arms' length like this. We're alone. There isn't any one in the world to interfere, and my heart is dry. Kiss me as though you cared just a little."

Her arms were around his neck, her head falling back, her lips close to his. A sudden coldness came over him. He remembered how he had longed and fought against the desire to kiss Susan. It wasn't fair, he had told himself. She must know life—she must have her chance. She was so young.

"Grant, kiss me."

He obeyed, coldly, and with no pretense of fervor.

"Gertrude," he said, "it's a horrible thing. You know I cared once. You know that once I was glad enough to kiss you."

"Is it that girl?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

Her arms slid away from him—white, reluctant arms, beautiful in shape and texture—arms with their own peculiar expression of despair, as they fell upon her lap. The life went out of her.

"She is so young," she murmured. "Such a child, Grant. She doesn't understand yet. You could leave her alone and she wouldn't be hurt. And you—you don't realize it, but you need more than that."

"Gertrude," he confessed, "I'm mad about her; I can't help it. She's one of a type, I know—a very beautiful but not an unusual type. But to me she's just herself. The way she looks, her voice, her laugh, her little mannerisms—they just sit in my heart; they make me feel tender and wonderful things, and there doesn't seem to be room for anything else."

Gertrude lay watching the lazy movements of the yacht as it rose and fell, watching the black tumult of waters, glittering, now and then, in the faint moonshine. For a time she seemed utterly inert. Then she rose suddenly to her feet.

"I have a fancy to walk, Grant," she said. "No, don't come, please. I would just like to walk alone. It is a fancy of mine."

He helped her to her feet. She drew a fur wrap around her shoulders, and turned hastily away. He leaned back in his chair, his eyes following her. She walked with rapid, unhesitating steps, sure-footed and graceful on the sloping deck, walked with her head a little uplifted, as though watching the rolling mast stab upward at the stars, as though she had passed into a world of her own thoughts, as though she were pursuing phantom ideas, seeking comfort in impotent essays of the imagination. The wind blew in her hair, but brought no color to her cheeks. Time after time she passed his chair without a glance, and each time it seemed to him that she was a little paler. At last he stopped her.

"You are tiring yourself, Gertrude," he said kindly. "Take my arm if you want to walk any more."

"You are right," she assented. "I will go down. Good night, Grant."

He kissed her fingers, shocked to find how cold they were. He insisted on taking her down the companionway to the door of her stateroom. She turned round there, and smiled at him a little wanly.

"You give me so much luxury, Grant," she sighed. "If only you could find a little kindness in your heart for me."

He felt suddenly brutal. He stooped and kissed her hands.

"Dear Gertrude," he whispered, "my heart is full of kindness. So full——"

"So full, Grant?"

"So full that I don't know how to offer it to you," he answered. "You see, I'm a clumsy brute, Gertrude, and I've never been able to forget the years when I thought you the most beautiful thing on earth."

"But you don't any longer!" she cried.

He turned away. She listened anxiously to his receding footsteps. Then she threw herself on the sofa with a little moan. Afterward she prepared for bed, left her door on the latch, wrapped a dressing-gown of wonderful, rose-colored silk around her, lit a reading-lamp, drew out a book at random, and made a pretense of reading. She waited, until she heard him come down the gangway, heard him pass her door with unfaltering footsteps, on his way to his own quarters, heard him open and close the door of his own room. Then she dropped the book and turned over on her face among the pillows.

GRANT, returning from an early stroll in the streets of New York on the morning after his arrival, looked with dismay at the three capable and determined-looking young men who occupied chairs in his sitting-room, and at the one young woman, who, having placed her notebook upon the table, was deeply immersed in a novel. He shook hands with all of them.

"Look here," he said. "I'm very glad to see you and to be welcomed back home; but what's it all about? I'm not a novelist, or a politician, or an English nobleman. You can't get headlines out of me."

"Not so sure that we mightn't, sir," Tarleton of the *Moon* replied cheerfully. "We thought, as we arrived in a bunch, we'd better wait and see whether you had any preference as to which section of the press you talked to. If you haven't, you can give it to us all together. We can use the stuff a bit differently."

"But I'm no use to you fellows," Grant protested. "I'd just as soon talk to you all together as singly. In fact, I'd rather. It saves time. But what do you want me to talk about?"

"First of all your voyage home," Tarleton suggested. "Some hurricane you struck, eh?"

"We ran into a terrible storm about two days out of Gibraltar," Grant told them. "The *Gray Lady* behaved magnificently. Captain Martin, and every one of my officers, really deserves a word of praise. We didn't even lose a boat, and, as you know, some of the big liners got badly knocked about."

"That's interesting," Tarleton admitted, making a few notes. "There's just one other thing about the voyage, Mr. Slattery?"

"Go ahead," Grant invited.

The three men looked at one another. Tarleton appeared to be almost embarrassed—an unusual situation for a newspaper man. Grant, who had pushed a box of cigars across the table, lit a cigarette and threw himself into an easy-chair.

"There have been some rumors going around," Tarleton said at last, "about a romantic stowaway."

"Really!" Grant remarked. "I haven't heard them. What sort of stowaway?"

"A lady," Booker interposed, taking up his share of the burden. "A lady who has been missing for some time from Monte Carlo."

"Is that so!" Grant exclaimed. "What was her name?"

"The Princess von Diss."

Grant stared at him for a moment.

"DO YOU mean to suggest that the Princess von Diss was a passenger on board my yacht?" he demanded.

"That's the story that's been going round," Tarleton acknowledged.

"The idea seems to be that she smuggled herself on board without your knowledge," Havers intervened, "and was only discovered on the third day out."

"A beautiful romance," Miss Phoebe Smiles murmured.

"Of course," Tarleton suggested diffidently, "this might very reasonably seem to be a subject upon which you might not care to talk. Say the word, and we'll quit. Put it to us that on the subject of the missing Princess von Diss Mr. Slattery had nothing to say, and down it goes in our books and we'll pass on to the next."

Grant smiled. "I think you can go a little farther than that," he said. "You can assure any one who is interested that I dined with the Princess von Diss the night before I left Monte Carlo, at a dinner given by Cornelius Blum—a dinner which included her husband, the Prince von Diss, the King of Gothland, the English Prime Minister, and various other distinguished people. Since that evening I have not seen or heard of the Princess."

The pencils were, for a moment, busy.

"One may take it, then," Tarleton ventured, "that these stories of a romantic stowaway being on board your yacht are untrue?"

"Entirely," Grant assured them. "There was a large black cat discovered when we were three days out. She was the only stowaway I know of."

There were a few more questions. Grant, rather artlessly, himself spoke of the invitation to America to join the Pact; spoke, too, of the indication of enmity by some countries, given by the three blackballs. And he sent the reporters away, not with the story they had sought, but with material for some sensational headlines.

GRANT, a little later in the morning, presented himself at the office of the newspaper in New York which was generally considered to be the most influential and weighty in the metropolis. Its correspondents were to be found in every capital of the world. One of its editors was received weekly at the White House. It stood for what was sane and beneficent in American life, and the cause which it espoused was seldom known to languish. The editor, Daniel Stoneham, was an old friend of Grant's, and saw him at once. The two men shook hands warmly.

"Good man, Grant!" Stoneham exclaimed. "Glad to see you back again. One hears of you hobnobbing with kings and prime ministers and the great people of the earth. Quite time you showed a little interest in your own country."

"Well, I'm here on the old job," Grant declared, sinking into the easy-chair to which his friend had pointed and accepting a cigarette.

"The deuce you are!" the other observed, with some surprise. "I thought since you had become a millionaire, you had turned slacker. I haven't heard anything of you for a year or so."

"I've been doing much more difficult and unpleasant work than ever before in my life," Grant confided. "I've been doing Secret Service work which is only half official. That is to say that if I get into trouble I'm not acknowledged and if I do any good work the Department gets the credit. That doesn't matter, though. The point is that I've made a scoop on my own. There's trouble brewing."

"What sort of trouble?" Stoneham demanded. "Do you mean anything in connection with the invitation from Nice?"

"Well, I'll tell you this, for one thing: That invitation would never have been sent, but for me."

"Say! You're not pulling my leg, are you?"

"I was never more in earnest in my life. It was touch and go with Lord Yeovil's proposition. There were three votes against it. Four would have barred it. The fourth man had been bought for fifty thousand pounds. I imitated the methods of the adventurous novelists and abducted him. I kept him out at sea all night and the voting took place without him. If he'd got there in time, Lord Yeovil's motion would have been defeated, America would never have been invited to join the Pact and the trouble which is even now brewing against her would have developed rapidly."

"Serious business this, Grant," Stoneham remarked.

"The most serious part of it is, it's the truth," Grant rejoined dryly. "However, the first stage in the battle has been won. The invitation has gone to Washington. Now I tell you where the second stage of the battle begins and where America will need the aid of every one of her loyal citizens. There will be, without the slightest doubt, an immense and cunningly engineered propaganda to prevent America's accepting that invitation. I want to fight that propaganda, Daniel. And I want you to help me."

THE editor sat back in his chair and his thoughtful gray eyes studied Grant's face. He was a short man, clean-shaven, with smooth black hair streaked with gray. Whenever any one wished to annoy him he called him the Napoleon of journalism. Still the likeness was there.

"Whose were the three votes against the invitation being sent to America?" he asked.

"Germany, Japan, and Russia."

"And the one which would have been given but for your intervention?"

"Scandinavia," Grant replied. "That, of course, has no political significance. It was simply that the man himself was bought."

"And what do you suppose is the reason for Germany and Japan voting against the United States being allowed to join the Pact?" Stoneham asked.

"I believe it is their intention to attack us," Grant pronounced. "The Pact only forbids aggressions against member nations. It has no jurisdiction even over its own members who find cause of quarrel with an outside country. We've been a little too high and mighty, Stoneham. If we'd decided to adopt the attitude of remaining outside the affairs of the world, we should never have subscribed to the limitation of armaments. Today, for all our great wealth, our immense man-power, and our supreme civilization, the combined armaments of Japan and Germany are precisely double our own."

"Of course," Stoneham said, "if any other man in the world were to come to me and talk like this, I should say that he was a lunatic."

"I am no lunatic, Dan," Grant declared. "I know very well what I am talking about."

"Have you any proofs?"

"I sent them to Washington an hour after I landed. You don't need them, Dan. You believe me, I know."

"Yes, I believe you."

"And you'll help? You'll put that in the forefront of your whole policy, the acceptance by the United States of this invitation from the Pact? You'll press it home to the people, Dan? Remember, it's our last chance. We've refused twice."

Stoneham was curiously silent. He was looking for a moment out of the uncurtained window, away over the skyscrapers and chimney pots to where little flashes of the blue Hudson, with its tangle and burden of sea and river-going craft, were visible. There was something smoldering in his eyes.

"Grant," he said at last, "you've brought me news. I have some to give you. In a way, although I never realized it before, my news bears upon yours."

"Get along with it," Grant begged.

"A commanding interest in this paper—three-quarters of the shares, in fact—was signed away last night. The control of the paper has gone out of our hands altogether."

"Who is the buyer?" Grant demanded eagerly.

"Felix Pottinger," was the quiet reply.

"And who's behind him?"

"They tried to keep that secret. But I found out by an accident. The real buyer is Cornelius Blum, of Berlin."

GRANT was thunderstruck. "Fifteen days ago," he confided after a brief silence, "I was a guest at a dinner party given by that man. A few days before that we were scrapping on my yacht. He tried to start a mutiny. Offered ten thousand pounds to some of my youngsters to get the yacht back in time for his Scandinavian friend to vote at the Nice Conference. Blum and I have had the gloves off all the time. He sent some one down from Berlin to spy on me at Monte Carlo. My God! This comes of our hospitality to foreigners. This is where we make a laughingstock of ourselves for all the world. Cornelius Blum! The German multimillionaire! The man who hates America, her industries and her politics is calmly allowed to come here and buy the only great American newspaper which represents no other interests save those of America!"

"There is a certain amount of irony in the situation," Stoneham admitted. "You know what happened, I dare say. The chief, after fifteen years of wisdom, went down to Wall Street a few months ago. He lost between five and ten millions and had a stroke. I suppose this will just see him through."

"I thought the old man wouldn't have done it if he'd been himself," Grant muttered. "I suppose I'd better go and see Dawson."

"You'll have a hard nut to crack. I heard Dawson speak only last night at a dinner. His references to the invitation were very perfunctory indeed. He's one of the men who believe in America for the Americans. You needn't look so depressed, though. What about me? I shall be out of a job within a week."

"Come and have some lunch," Grant invited.

Stoneham shook his head.

"I guess not. We're all in a state of nerves here. Waiting to hear what's going to happen. The sale seems to have been a lightninglike affair. We're expecting a visit from Pottinger any minute. Shouldn't be surprised if he takes us over within twenty-four hours."

"Couldn't you get one article in?" Grant suggested.

"I'll try," Stoneham assented. "Where are you?"

"The Great Central. They're getting my flat ready if I stay on. Things seem a trifle uncertain at present."

"I'll ring you up," Stoneham promised.

Grant lunched at his club, where he met many of his friends and acquaintances, to whom he was simply a rather restless, much-to-be-envied millionaire. Whenever he could, he brought the subject of conversation round to the Nice invitation. To a certain extent he was dismayed by the prevalent criticism.

"Guess there's no one in the world as thick-skinned as a Britisher," one man declared. "You can't keep him in his place unless you tie him there. What does America want, sending her best men away from home and spending her time and money on those conferences? They don't amount to anything, anyway."

"England's got a scare about something or other and wants to hold her big relation's hand," another usually well-informed man remarked. "For all their strength, there was never a less self-reliant nation."

"It's just like English statesmanship to make it difficult for them down in Washington," a third occupant of the room pointed out. "It simply puts our Government in an embarrassing situation. Nobody wants to seem ungracious, and it won't be very easy to say no. At the same time, I can't see that a shadow of good can come of acceptance. They're always squabbling at the Pact meetings, as they are at the Limitation of Armaments. The latest canard now is that Japan has secretly built some flying ships which could destroy any fleet afloat."

Grant remained a listener only. He left the club about the middle of the afternoon and, after a few minutes' anxious deliberation, was driven to the Hotel des Ambassadeurs.

"Is the Princess von Diss staying here?" he asked the clerk at the desk.

"Not at present, sir," the young man replied, with a curious glance at Grant.

"I saw by the newspapers that she was in Newport," the latter persisted, "and was coming here."

"We have been asked for no reservation at present," he was assured.

Grant scribbled the name of his hotel and the number of his suite on the back of a card and passed it across.

"If the Princess should arrive," he begged, "will you let her have this?"

"With pleasure, sir."

GRANT went back to his sitting-room and considered the situation. If he approached Dawson, the editor and part-proprietor of the next most important paper to the *New York*, he was absolutely sure of an unsympathetic hearing. Dawson, already prejudiced, would believe nothing without proofs, and such proofs as Grant possessed were by this time in the hands of his official sponsor in Washington. He changed early, dined at another of his clubs and wandered into two or three more of which he was a member. He found nowhere any particular interest in the subject which was to him such a vital one. Everybody was hugely concerned with his own affairs, the price of American stocks, the latest singer at the Opera, the winning of the amateur golf championship of the world by an American, the success of the American tennis players on the Riviera. A few people seemed to regard Lord Yeovil's proposition as a kindly act, but one altogether unnecessary. America was splendid in her isolation, strong and secure as the Rock of Gibraltar. No wonder there was a desire on the part of the other nations to fasten like limpets upon her. One didn't wish to hurt England's feelings, but it would have been better policy to inquire first whether such an invitation would be acceptable.

"And how the mischief," Grant was driven to observe at last, "could America have replied to that? We haven't an official, even the President, with sufficient authority. The matter now is put on a definite basis. The Senate must decide."

"Sure," the young man to whom he had been speaking agreed listlessly. "Look here, Grant," he went on with a sudden accession of interest, "you must have seen the Hoyt brothers play over at Monte Carlo. Is it true, what they say—that the elder's getting stale? I've a thousand dollars on their match against the Frenchmen."

"I saw very little tournament tennis," Grant answered. "The Hoyts are great favorites for the match, anyhow."

He found his way back to his rooms comparatively early. There was no telephone message from the Ambassadeurs, only a scribbled note from Stoneham:

Dear Grant:
Thought you'd like to know Pottinger took us over at six o'clock, asked to see the leading article for tomorrow's paper, and tore it into small pieces. He's in possession. We're out, lock, stock and barrel. You'd better get to work. DAN.

Grant tore the note thoughtfully across and put through a long-distance call to Washington. Then he threw himself wearily into an easy-chair. The roar of the city, abating but slightly as night advanced, still mercilessly insistent, soothed him. He closed his eyes, mindful of sleepless nights. The tinkle of the telephone bell awakened him. In a few moments he was through to Washington.

"Brenden, Secretary, speaking," a voice announced. "Is that Mr. Slattery?"

"Yes."

"Can you come to Washington tomorrow? The Chief would like to see you?"

"I'll catch the first train," Grant promised.

He went to bed better satisfied. The struggle had commenced.

ON THE whole, Grant felt that he was well received at Washington. A very great man indeed vouchsafed him his confidence.

"I am going to tell you, Mr. Slattery," he said, "that I, personally, am in favor of accepting the invitation of the Pact of Nations. I have met Lord Yeovil once or twice and I know he is sincere in his friendship for this country. The attitude of isolation, which some of our most brilliant statesmen have acclaimed, is not, in my opinion, a sound one in these days of practical politics. I would welcome a decision of my Government which brought us into line with the great Powers of Europe.

At the same time, to be equally frank with you, I cannot for one moment believe that there exists any Power in the world or any combination of Powers which would dream of flaunting the world's desire for peace and of making an unprovoked attack upon us."

"Neither would I, sir," Grant answered hastily, "unless I had lived in the shadow of these people and had imbibed their hopes and ambitions. Take for one moment Japan. I have lived in Tokyo, and other cities of the country, for a year. I lived there not as an American but as an Englishman. Japan is a very proud country. The sons of her overpopulated Empire have penetrated with difficulty but still without vital resistance into most quarters of the world. It has remained for America to place an embargo upon her citizenship, to enunciate the great principle of the inferiority of the yellow race. There, sir, lies the cause of the undying enmity of the people of Japan."

"It was an economic, not a political decision," his host reminded him.

"That has not affected the question," Grant insisted. "The feeling is there. Then take the case of Germany. She cannot strike against England or France. They are members of the Pact. But do you think that twenty years, or two hundred years, would quench that desire for revenge which has been part of the birthright of every living German today? There remains, of her foes, only America. Do you realize, sir, the anomaly of subscribing to the Limitation of Armaments and refusing to accept the protection of .the Pact of Nations?"

"Theoretically, again, yes," was the considered reply, "but practically I am entirely with my advisers. I do not believe in the possibility of any hostile action against this country. At the same time, you will see that I am quite frank with you, for I admit I should prefer to be associated with the Pact of Nations. My efforts will be devoted in that direction."

"I beg that you will make them strenuous efforts, sir," Grant enjoined. "You have read the memoranda I addressed to the Secretary?"

"With great interest and some amusement," was the smiling reply. "Am I really to accept the account of the happenings on board your yacht as being authentic?"

"They are not even exaggerated, sir," Grant said earnestly. "If I had not kept Funderstrom out all that night, Lord Yeovil's motion would have been lost."

"I must accept your word, of course. On the other hand, you must admit that the whole thing reads like fiction. Before we leave this subject, Mr. Slattery, I should like to ask you one more question. You have spoken of the hostile intentions of Japan and Germany against this country. Have you ever come to any conclusion as to the manner in which this hostility was to be displayed?"

"SIR," Grant replied, "I am a wealthy man, so this is of no moment, but I have spent a hundred thousand dollars trying to get hold of a document which I know to be in existence. There is an elaborate scheme, agreed to by Japan and Germany, which is intended to strike at the very heart of our existence, and for which I have the strongest reasons for believing that Mr. Cornelius Blum is responsible. There are two people from whom I hope to obtain it. Both have, so far, disappointed me.

"Nevertheless, I shall get it some day. As regards the part of the comspiracy dealing with direct warfare, that, without a doubt, is to be conducted by sea—the German fleet coming from eastward to the Atlantic seaboard, the Japanese fleet to San Francisco. I might point out, sir, that the American fleet, honorably kept within the Limitation of Armaments statutes, would be utterly unequal to dealing with adversaries arriving from opposite directions!"

"You drive me to the conclusion, Mr. Slattery, that I am devoid of imagination," his host observed, smiling. "I cannot conceive the spectacle of those two fleets approaching our shores with a hostile purpose. You need not take it as a cause for alarm that I am unable to embrace your theory. So far as you are concerned, I am with you on the practical side of the matter. My influence will be directed toward securing an acceptance of Lord Yeovil's proposition."

Grant rose to his feet. His companion laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

"My wife desires that you will give us the pleasure of lunching with us," he said. "Her mother and yours were friends, as you may know. And I myself was at Harvard with your uncle. I knew your father, too, although he was graduated a year or two before me. You are, I hope, free?"

"I shall be honored," Grant said.

LUNCHEON was an informal meal. A few officials were present, two ladies who were distant relatives of the host, a recent arrival among the diplomats and a newly elected Senator. The presiding genius of the establishment took Grant under her special protection.

"I'm not going to pretend to be tactful, Mr. Slattery," she declared, "because you know that Gertrude's mother and I were great friends, and I was at one time very fond of Gertrude. I think I was one of the first to notice her friendship with Otto von Diss, and certainly one of the first to disapprove of it. I'm a terrible gossip, and I read all the society papers. So of course I know that you have been meeting at Monte Carlo. Tell me, has she changed?"

"She is as beautiful as ever," Grant said, "but she has certainly changed. She has gained a great deal, and I think lost something."

"She can't possibly be still in love with that ridiculous little husband of hers?"

Grant was silent for a moment. He felt that his hostess's lack of reserve was really the truest form of tact. But the things she did not know were burning in his brain.

"I did not see a great deal of Gertrude in Monte Carlo," he said. "Her husband arrived unexpectedly, and I think he is of a very jealous temperament."

"Were you speaking of Gertrude von Diss?" one of the women from across the table interposed. "I see from the paper that she is in Newport, just arrived from Europe."

His hostess turned inquiringly toward Grant.

"I heard the same rumor," the latter remarked; "but I scarcely think that it can be true. I inquired in New York, but no one there knew anything about her. At the same time it is certainly a fact, as I learned this morning, that her husband's friend Cornelius Blum, who was with us all at Monte Carlo, landed in New York two days ago. The von Disses may have come with him."

Grant's host frowned for a moment.

"Blum seems to have a great many friends in this country," he observed. "He appears to spend half his time going back and forth."

"His present visit seems to have been to some purpose," Grant declared a little bitterly.

"In what respect?"

Grant was for a moment taken aback.

"You know about Mr. Cornelius Blum's purchase, sir?" he ventured.

"I've heard nothing," was the somewhat impatient reply.

"I am sure I beg your pardon, sir. It would have been my first item of news, but I never imagined that Gordon Marsham would have acted without giving you notice."

"What's Gordon Marsham got to do with it?"

"Just this much, sir," Grant said. "He has sold the *New York* to Cornelius Blum. A man named Pottinger is the new editor and ostensible owner. Stoneham's article which should have appeared this morning, welcoming the invitation from the Pact, was torn into small pieces."

Grant's host was more perturbed than he had been during the whole of the morning. "Marsham's action," he declared, "is absolutely unbelievable. He knows perfectly well that the *New York* has become almost the mouthpiece of the Government. To dispose of it secretly, just now, to a German-American, without even advising us, is an amazing proceeding. You are sure that you are not misinformed, Mr. Slattery?"

"Absolutely certain," was the confident reply. "The discourtesy to you, sir, can only be explained by Mr. Marsham's breakdown in health."

"It is a very serious event," was the grave acknowledgment. "The *New York* was the greatest American paper—a paper which, when things really mattered, brushed aside minor issues and preached the gospel of real things. One of the editors used to be here every week. I always treated him with the utmost confidence."

"Have you ever met Cornelius Blum, sir?" Grant inquired.

"Once only. A genial, simple fellow he seemed, for such a master of industry. I could scarcely believe that I was talking to the owner of so many gigantic commercial undertakings."

"He is outwardly the most simple and good-natured and inwardly the most inscrutable person I ever came across," Grant confided. "There is a rumor about him that he carries wherever he goes, night and day, locked and padlocked in a little casket of gold, a letter written by his father on his deathbed."

"How romantic!" one of the women murmured.

"Has any one any idea as to its contents?" some one else asked.

Grant shook his head. "I was once told," he said, "that if one could read that letter one could read the riddle of Blum's life. I have formed my own idea concerning it."

"A secret?" his hostess inquired.

"Not among us," Grant replied. "I believe that it is an injunction from Blum, senior—who died, they say, of a broken heart, some years after the signing of the Peace of Versailles—to his son to devote his life toward avenging Germany's humiliation. Personally, I believe that that is the motive before Blum day and night. I believe that with that end in view he is deliberately working to upset the peace of the world."

GRANT'S pronouncement was received, as he had expected, with disfavor. His host merely smiled. The Senator from the West, who had been waiting impatiently for an opportunity to join in the conversation, cleared his throat and leaned forward a little.

"Sir," he said, "I guess every man in this country is free to express his opinions. Those may be yours, but I'd like just to tell you how the people down in my state look upon such talk. They say that trouble is made by talking about it, that most of the wars of the world have come about through newspaper discussion in advance and mischievous people going about putting belligerent thoughts into the minds of peaceful people.

"If I heard you, sir, make such a statement as you have made on a public platform, I should conceive it my duty to use every gift of oratory with which I have been endowed to demonstrate to your audience the futility, the absurdity, and the immorality of such a statement. Hearing it under this roof, sir, I say no more than this: War and the desire for war are dead among the civilized nations of the world. We are every one of us grappling hard with social and economic problems of far greater consequence. The whimper of a person like Cornelius Blum, for all his millions, is less than the voice crying in the wilderness, when one considers the majority and colossal power of the chief nation against whom that voice is raised."

Grant inclined his head courteously. The bombast of the Senator's words had appealed slightly to the sense of humor of most of them. Yet Grant was perfectly well aware that the man had spoken the truth when he declared that he was voicing the views of the people of his state. It was a representative expression of opinion. He could even see a qualified assent to it in the faces of most of the little party. His host applied the closure.

"Well," he said, "we must not drift into too serious argument. We shall all have an opportunity of expressing our views presently upon this subject."

"In the meantime, sir," Grant begged, "might I ask Mr. Senator Ross one question?"

"By all means," was the prompt assent.

"Would you, sir," Grant went on, turning toward the Senator, "vote for the United States accepting the invitation of the Pact of Nations?"

"I should not," was the decided reply. "The Pact of Nations may have need of the United States. The United States has no need of the Pact. As a citizen of the United States, I am prouder of the present isolated attitude of my country than I am, even, of her undoubted supremacy in every field of economics and civilization."

The Senator's sonorous statement was the signal for the breaking up of the little party. Grant was accompanied to the door by one of the secretaries with whom he had some previous acquaintance.

"The old type remains, I see," Grant remarked with a smile.

"It's the type beloved of the semi-professional politicians," the young man declared. "We have one of them to lunch every week. The chief can't stand them in larger doses. But you know they have an enormous backing."

Grant felt the warning behind his friend's words, as he walked slowly toward the club where he was staying. It was the West, the big, brawny West, with its polyglot population and immense material property, which he chiefly feared.

GRANT left Washington with a curious mixture of impressions. He had spent a fortnight in the political capital of his country and yet he came away with a strange conviction that he had been somewhere on the edge of real things, that he had talked of vital events with men whose interest in them was chiefly academic. Washington might be the furnace, but impulse took him where the fuel lay. He spent four days in Chicago. He went on to St. Louis and then to Minneapolis. Then he turned back to Boston, where he breathed an entirely different atmosphere. The editors of two great newspapers believed in him and were ready to preach his doctrine. Nevertheless when, after six weeks' absence, he found himself back in New York, it was with a feeling rather of discomfiture than of self-satisfaction that he viewed his progress. The magnificent self-assurance of his country seemed impregnable. Even where he had been listened to most kindly he felt that he was receiving the indulgence accorded to a crank.

At his hotel he took up his pile of letters and sorted them through. One by one he passed them by. He had commenced his task with a sinking heart. He finished it with a curious bewilderment. There was no letter from Gertrude. He rang up the Ambassadeurs. They had received no news of any projected visit from the Princess. He felt himself face to face with a new situation. The problems with which he had expected to be confronted seemed to have melted away. Yet to him there was something ominous and disconcerting in this state of negation, something which seemed like the corollary of his own threatened failure in the larger enterprise which he had embraced. He was not an abnormally temperamental person but a fit of black depression suddenly swept over him. The thought of Susan, her sweet, girlish charm, her ingenuous appeal, tugged at his heartstrings with swift and passionate little bursts of memory. He cursed himself for the hesitation which had kept him that last night at the Villa, when they had stood alone upon the balcony, and the chance had been his, from taking her into his arms.

That one kiss which he had craved from her would have clad him in the armor of a gigantic selfishness toward every other claim or appeal. She had been right. The difference between their ages was a trifling matter, something to be reckoned with if she had been a simpering schoolgirl of her years, but for Susan—with her understanding, her insight, her delightful womanliness—a thing not worthy of consideration. What was she thinking of him now, he wondered. There had been a certain guardedness in the press but the story of Gertrude's flight had blazed along the Riviera, the more ardently believed in because of the mystery surrounding it. Lord Yeovil's letters, kindly still, and even friendly, betrayed signs of it. There was no mention of Susan or any message from her, a certain restraint in dealing in any way with personal topics.

Grant moved restlessly to the window. Although it was his own city, the loneliness of a stranger in New York seemed to have enveloped him in a cloud of deepening depression. The magnitude, the somber magnificence of it all, the towering buildings, the height from which he looked down at the streets like illuminated belts, the tangle of distant lights upon the river, the dull roar of ever proceeding traffic, seemed almost terrifying; a city honeycombed with people, moving on at the hand of destiny—a contemplation for the philosopher, an invitation toward lunacy to the lonely individual. Grant momentarily lost his courage. He seemed cut off from his friends, the destroyer of his own happiness. The sight of a familiar face, the sound of a cheery voice at that moment, would have been a joy to him.

He answered almost eagerly a knock at his door. A man entered, a man with the two things for which he had felt himself craving—a smile and a cheerful face—but the last person in the world from whom he was expecting to receive a visit.

"Blum!" he exclaimed.

The newcomer laughed cheerfully as he deposited his silk hat and Malacca cane upon the table and withdrew his evening gloves.

"Well, well!" he said. "I thought we might meet over here. I don't offer to shake hands, although I'd be very glad to. I've come for a chat, though, and when I chat, I like to be comfortable. May I have an easy-chair, a whisky and soda, and a cigar? I have just left the Opera, and I am a little exhausted with the wonder of it. Your new prima donna is marvelous."

Grant rang for the waiter.

"What on earth have you come to see me about, Blum?" he asked.

"My dear fellow, what a question!" the other replied, looking round the room and finally selecting his chair. "Enemies always visit one another. It lends spice to combat. Now the one of us with the keener brain will leave this interview the gainer. Which of us will it be, I wonder? A most interesting speculation."

"After your magnificent banquet in Monte Carlo my last evening there," Grant said, "I think that you are making very slight demands upon my hospitality."

"I shall make larger ones upon your patience, perhaps," Blum declared. "You're not looking well. This rushing around from one big city to another, these conclaves in Washington, do not agree with you so well as the sunshine of the Riviera."

"You seem pretty well informed as to my movements."

"Naturally. We do not keep a large and expensive secret service going here for nothing. I could give you a most faithful record of your movements on every day since your arrival, starting with your visit to your friend Stoneham of the *New York*, your luncheon at the club and your subsequent visit to the Hotel des Ambassadeurs and winding up with the telephone message which called you to Washington."

"Wonderful!" Grant murmured, affecting unconcern, but in reality a little staggered. "Here's your drink. Will you help yourself?"

Mr. Blum prepared his highball with care, lit his cigar and leaned back in his chair.

"I am thankful," he confessed, "that prohibition in this country was before my time. It did some good, they tell me. Swept away the saloons and kept the alcoholic strength of spirits down. On the whole, however, it must have been very uncomfortable."

"The statute was modified almost out of existence before I took an interest in such things," Grant remarked.

Blum was silent for a moment or two. He had completely the air of a man steeped in the atmosphere of the music he has enjoyed and dropping in for some slight refreshment with a friend.

"MR. SLATTERY," he said, a little abruptly, "one of the objects of my visit is to congratulate you upon your failure."

"My failure?" Grant repeated.

"Precisely. At Monte Carlo you scored a daring and well-deserved victory. There were a dozen ways by which we could have outwitted you, but luck was on your side. You brought off one of the crudest pieces of amateur, melodramatic brigandage I ever remember to have read of in the pages of your most flamboyant novelists. Still, you brought it off. You scored the trick. Dazzled a little, shall we say, by success, you start off now to attempt the impossible. Here, my young friend, you are, in plain parlance, up against a hopeless proposition. You want to drive home to the statesmen and the people of the United States the fact that a certain combination of forces, with Germany, of course, as the villain of the play, is planning a warlike enterprise of some sort or other against this country in revenge for its intervention in 1917. You cannot do it."

"Can't I?" Grant murmured.

Cornelius Blum smiled. Very reluctantly he knocked the ash from his cigar.

"Well, ask yourself how far you have succeeded at present," he went on. "You have had every possible advantage. You have visited Washington as persona grata. You have talked with officials and statesmen to whom you are personally well known and whom your high character and reputation must influence largely in your favor. You had a very pleasant time socially; everybody was very nice to you. How much progress did you make?"

"Go on, please."

"You have since visited most of the principal cities in the States. You have interviewed a great many newspaper proprietors. You have given lectures. The only place where you really created an impression was Boston and there the ground was already prepared for you. I do not think that I am far from the mark when I offer you my congratulations upon your failure."

"But why congratulations?" Grant asked. "Why not sympathy?"

Mr. Blum pinched his cigar and smiled thoughtfully.

"If you had been a real danger to us," he confided, "we should have had to take steps—very regrettable steps. You can scarcely imagine that a completely organized secret service, of whose existence I have just given you proof, can be without agents who are prepared to go to any lengths which necessity might demand."

"You mean that you would have had me assassinated?"

Blum shrugged his shoulders.

"We should have tried to avoid melodrama. You would probably have met with an accident."

"This is very interesting," Grant admitted. "I am alive on sufferance, then?"

"Don't put it like that, I beg you."

"Supposing I become dangerous?"

"Why conjure up these disagreeable possibilities?" Cornelius Blum expostulated. "I do not see any immediate prospect of your becoming dangerous. You have no organization, no definite propaganda, no real evidence of the things which you fear. For your information I may tell you this: Short of an absolute upheaval, there is not the slightest doubt that the Senate will refuse sanction to the President to accept this invitation of the Pact of Nations."

"Why are you so anxious that America should not join the Pact?" Grant asked.

Mr. Blum smiled.

"If you knew that," he announced, "then perhaps we should have to label you dangerous, which, as I have previously explained, would not be good for your health. Now, my young friend, we have had a pleasant talk. Shall I tell you what I really came to see you about?"

Grant glanced at the clock. It was long past midnight.

"Perhaps it would be as well."

"I came," Blum said, "to ask whether you can give me any information as to the whereabouts of my friend von Diss's wife."

"I HAVE not the slightest idea," Grant assured him coolly. "In any case, why come to me?"

"There is an impression upon the Riviera and elsewhere that the Princess left Monaco on your yacht."

"The impression is ridiculous," Grant declared.

"Is it?" Blum murmured. "Well, well! The Princess——"

Grant stopped him with an imperative gesture.

"Do you mind leaving the Princess out of this conversation?" he interrupted. "I do not care, at any time, about discussing women. The Princess is an old friend of mine, a new friend of yours. Some other subject of conversation, if you please, or I shall be forced to remind you that the hour is late."

"Quite a sound attitude," Blum remarked reflectively. "Still, you might remember that I am her husband's oldest friend, and domestic relations in Germany are treated, I think, a little more sacredly than in most countries. I might even go so far as to say that I represent the Prince."

"As to the Prince's representative," Grant retorted, "there is the door. To Mr. Cornelius Blum—my enemy, I know, but whose conversation and sense of humor attract me—I would suggest another whisky and soda."

Blum helped himself sparingly and rose to his feet. He knew his man, and the ostensible object of his visit remained unfulfilled.

"Apropos of our former subject of conversation, Mr. Slattery," he said, "take my advice. Don't become too prominent in your propaganda, and above all don't be too inquisitive. There are some things which you would give a great deal to discover, but discovery of which would mean your death. You are a young man and reasonably fond of living, I am sure."

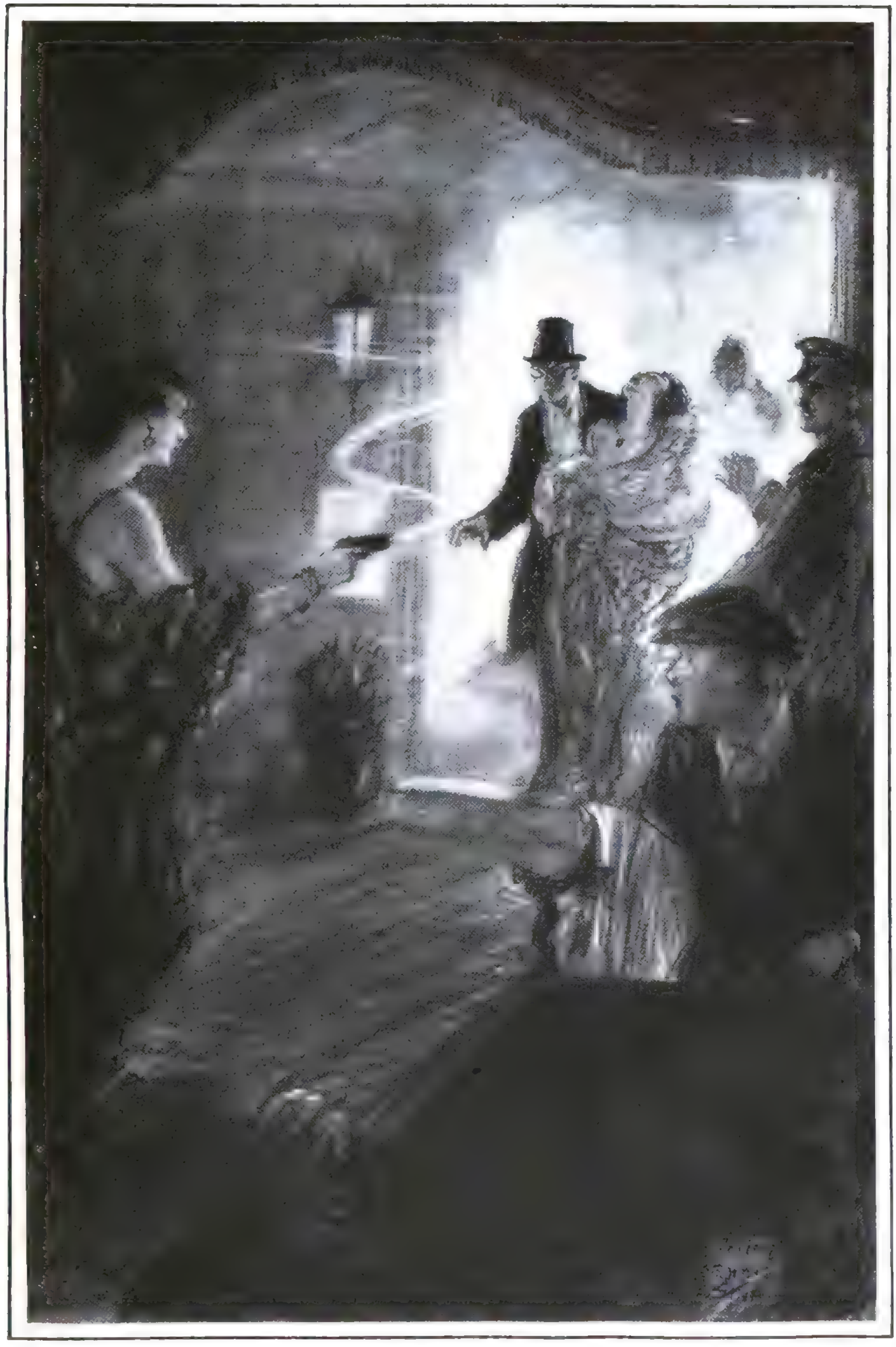
"Not only that," Grant replied, "but I mean to live until my work is done."

Mr. Blum finished his highball slowly and thoughtfully. Then he rose, put on his hat, and hung his overcoat over his arm.

"A very pleasant chat, Mr. Slattery," he concluded. "I like you, you know. You are a young man of imagination and spirit. I wish that you were a German."

Grant held open the door.

"If you had been endowed with a conscience at your birth, you wouldn't have made a bad American," he reciprocated.



"Count Itash was leaving Mason's restaurant with Mademoiselle Yvonne when two shots were fired from among the passers-by."

Cornelius Blum, Grant found, had not exaggerated the power of his propaganda. Stoneham, returning from a trip, confirmed all that he had said. And in a long session, after his arrival, he and Grant planned measures to counter Blum's activity. Writers were to be encouraged, subsidized at need; everything possible was to be done. But Stoneham was not hopeful.

Later they emerged into Broadway, with its medley of blazing lights, its throng of people, its indefinable but ever existent fascination. Grant stopped short and pulled his companion up as they watched a couple descend from an automobile and cross the pavement toward a famous supper place.

"Some one you know?" Stoneham inquired.

His companion nodded. "Slightly. The man was at Monte Carlo, in attendance upon the Japanese Ambassador. Itash, his name is. The girl was one of the dancers at the Café de Paris. It's rather a coincidence, seeing them here."

"Why?"

"Because," Grant explained, "I very nearly got hold of some wonderful information from the young woman who used to be the sweetheart of Itash before he took up with this girl. How she got it from him I don't know, but she got it. She was half mad with jealousy and she sent for me. By the time I got there, though, Itash had made it up with her, and she would tell me nothing. Now—if one could only get hold of her now, there might be something doing!"

Stoneham shrugged his shoulders.

"Japanese diplomats," he said, "even the youngsters, are not noted for their ingenuousness. I can't imagine that young man Itash, as you call him, giving much away."

"Neither can I," Grant agreed, "but she was very positive, and she did tell me one or two things."

"Then if I were you," Stoneham suggested, "I should get into touch with her as quickly as possible. Send her a cable and tell her what's going on. She wouldn't be the first jealous woman who's saved or lost an empire."

After he left Stoneham, Grant walked without spirit back to his hotel. As he entered the suite, however, he stopped short. The person who had been in his thoughts for days was seated there, smoking a cigarette and, apparently, waiting for his return. A pile of magazines was strewn before her, the pages of which she was turning over a little listlessly. At Grant's entrance she pushed them all away from her with an air of relief. She looked across at him somberly, yet gladly. There was not a flicker of emotion, not an effort at coquetry. She was just now as she was when they had fought their little duel once before, silent, imperturbable, a trifle contemptuous.

"Mademoiselle Cleo!" he exclaimed.

"Monsieur," she replied, "you have been a long time coming."

"Not so long, mademoiselle," he replied promptly, "as you have been in keeping your word."

She rose to her feet. More than ever there seemed to be feline suggestions about the way she looked and stretched herself.

"Be so kind," she begged, "as to order me some tea and some more cigarettes. I think—I am almost sure—that I have made up my mind to tell you the things you desire to know."

Grant rang the bell and gave the waiter an order. Then he pulled up an easy-chair for her and seated himself opposite.

"Did you come with Itash or did you follow him?" he asked simply.

"I followed him," she acknowledged. "What I was told I could not believe. Last night I saw with my own eyes. He has brought Yvonne here, brought her to New York. He, who had promised me a hundred times— But that makes no matter."

"Did you come alone?"

"I came alone. It was an evil day for Itash when I came."

CORNELIUS BLUM was a guest such as hotel proprietors dream of and very seldom have the chance to entertain. His demands were always on a magnificent scale and no spendthrift prince in the days when there were such beings could have shown less disposition to haggle. At the Great Central Hotel in New York he had a suite of five or six rooms, the most simple of which was his own bedchamber.

Blum's sitting-room, too, was simple—

an apartment with a great writing table, a special telephone and very little else in the way of furniture. The chair occupied by his visitors was a comfortable one enough, but it faced the north light. Even Itash blinked behind his spectacles as he subsided into its depths.

"You have news, my young friend?" Blum inquired of his caller.

"There is very little," the latter answered, speaking with his usual deliberation. "Four more names have been sent in from our headquarters at San Francisco. They are all vouched for. They all desire places of responsibility. One of them, a fruit grower in California, is well known to me. His father was in the service of our family."

Cornelius Blum nodded.

"Good," he said. "You have places for them?"

"For the first three," Itash replied. "The man I spoke of last, I have sent for. I propose to take him into the Intelligence."

"You have no other news?"

"There is no other news. May I smoke?"

Blum nodded his permission. He sat back in his chair apparently studying his visitor. Itash was by no means a pleasant personality. The strength of his face lay rather in his cunning than in any other quality. His mouth was cruel; his eyes, as bright as beads, too shifty. His complexion was yellow even for an Oriental. His black hair reeked of the productions of the barber shop. The handkerchief which he had been holding in his hand seemed steeped with some powerful scent. The cigarette which he presently began to smoke had a pungent and almost sickly odor.

"Count Itash," Blum said at last, "you are a very clever young man of the oriental school, but you have one fault. You are too fond of women."

Itash removed his cigarette from his mouth. He seemed a little uncertain how to take the other's speech. In the end he grinned.

"In your country," he retorted, "it is wine and beer, and food. In mine it is flowers and women."

"You may dabble in horticulture as much as you choose," Blum observed dryly, "but women are dangerous."

"I have learnt to manage them," the young man declared.

"So far as your personal comfort is concerned, no doubt that is so," Blum acknowledged; "but you must remember that, to me and many others, you do not exist as a young scion of the Japanese nobility who desires to achieve success as a diplomatist and walk meanwhile in the flowery ways. You are something more vital. You are a part depository of the greatest secret the world has ever known. Itash, if a single bead of the truth has sweated out of your carcass, you shall be looking for your own particular corner in hell before the moon changes."

Blum struck the table in front of him, not heavily, but with a sharp menacing tap. There were lines in his face now which few people ever saw. His cheeks had sagged a little, his eyes had sunk. His lips had parted, and one of his teeth, always a slight disfigurement, had, for the moment, the appearance of a fang. Itash dropped his cigarette. The sudden attack had paralyzed him. He looked like a man stricken through fear into idiocy.

"Pick that up," Blum directed, "and speak the truth, or nothing that I have ever threatened you with will count by the side of the things which shall surely happen. What have you told Cleo, the dancing girl of Monte Carlo?"

"Nothing, upon the tomb of my fathers!" the young man swore.

He picked up the cigarette. Blum's questioning eyes still held him.

"UPON the great matters," he went on, "I have never spoken in my life with any human being, and as to women—they are my toys. I have never treated one seriously. It is not our way in Japan. There is not one of them who knows a thought that is in my brain, a feeling that comes from the heart. Not one, not one!"

"You know that this dancing girl has followed you to New York?" Blum demanded.

"What has that to do with the matters that count?" Itash inquired wonderingly. "She has been the companion of my idle moments, she has never asked a question: she is like the others, a being for the dance, the wine, an hour or so of love. I tire of her and I take another companion. Sometimes you change wine for beer, is it not so? She is a foolish being and my notice has been pleasant to her. She is jealous—women are made like that. What does it matter?"

"I hear your words," Cornelius Blum said. "Now listen to this, Itash, and tell me what you make of it with your oriental wisdom. This dancing girl has followed you from Monte Carlo to New York. Two nights ago she visited Grant Slattery, was in his room for two hours. What do you make of that?"

"It is her profession," Itash sneered.

"You think so? That is the oriental kink in you," Blum declared. "A man like Grant Slattery doesn't amuse himself with the cast-off mistresses of such as you. Now listen! Of your wisdom answer me this. Why, on the morning after her visit, did Grant Slattery himself interview the managers of the three great steel companies with which Japan has dealt in this country?"

Itash's face expressed only bewilderment. He seemed utterly unable to read the riddle of Blum's words.

"I am foolish," he confessed. "I cannot see what distresses you. I cannot understand what Cleo——"

Blum pulled him up. He was convinced that the young man was at least a harmless agent of his own undoing.

"Listen," he interrupted. "You are one of the few persons in a position to call the attention of people whom it might concern to the fact that Japan, during the last three years, has purchased more steel in the United States than would build her six battleships allowed her by the Limitation of Armaments twice over and relay every line of railway she has in Japan. Cleo, your sweetheart, comes to see Grant Slattery, and Grant Slattery interviews representatives of these three steel companies the very next morning."

"Never have I opened my lips to Cleo upon any such subject in my life," the young man asserted fervently. "She knows nothing. She can know nothing."

"Humph!" Blum grunted. "The puzzle remains then. But I do not understand it. I am uneasy—it is one of the most unfortunate things which could have happened that this annual meeting of the Limitation of Armaments should be fixed for a date just before the question of joining the Pact comes up in the Senate. We keep our secrets well—we, who understand these things—but there are other matters besides the secrets of your country's warships which are there to be discovered, if the fortune went against us. A scare at the Conference might undo all our great work."

"There will be no scare," Itash declared. "Our extra battleships are hidden. No one knows that each has a sister ship."

"There remains that visit," Blum muttered. "I had rather you collected butterflies."

"I should be as likely to tell the butterflies my secrets," the young man scoffed. "You should know that we do not treat womankind as you do. They are the marionettes who dance for our pleasure. To treat them seriously would spoil our joy of them."

STONEHAM returned from a lecturing tour in the West, dispirited, and with a frank confession of failure. He presented himself at Grant's rooms just as the latter was finishing breakfast.

"I've bad news, old chap," he declared at once. "I've done my best, and I guess I've made about as much impression upon my audiences as if Pussyfoot Johnson had come back to life and were preaching prohibition once more. They won't have it at any price."

Grant pushed a box of cigars across the table and rang for a waiter to remove his tray.

"'America outside' still their motto, eh?" he observed as he drew a chair up to the open window.

"You see," Stoneham went on, "they've never forgotten what a triumph it was for American diplomacy that our people, in those days, refused all invitations to join the Genoa Conference. We scored immensely all round by remaining outside, and you know what a general muddle that affair ended in. The fact of it is," he continued, selecting and lighting his cigar, "our people over here have never regained their faith in British diplomacy since those days. They can't see that they stand to be hurt in any way by remaining outside, and they can see that they might be drawn into a lot of trouble if they got involved in some of these economic disputes. We make our own rules now and play our own game, and we're the richest country in the world. It's a pretty hard situation to meet, Grant."

Grant was less perturbed than his companion had imagined possible.

"I've talked with Cornelius Blum, since you've been away," he said. "I've heard the same story from him. I believe he's right. I believe you're right. I believe that if the matter were to be decided upon today the invitation to join the Pact would be rejected by an overwhelming majority. Fortunately, the meeting of the Limitation of Armaments Conference is to come first."

"Sure, but what difference does that make?" Stoneham inquired.

"It's going to make all the difference," Grant assured him. "I'm on the track of things already, and the conference doesn't take place for another month."

"Am I to be wise to this?"

"You are. But we've got to move warily. Blum can afford to be good-natured about our fight against him so far as it has gone. He knows very well that his propaganda department is in perfect order. He can practically count his votes. He knows that in a fight as things are at present, we haven't a chance. The moment he realizes that we are getting round his flanks, though, he'll be dangerous. Dan, you remember my telling you about Cleo, the little dancing girl who used to go about with Count Itash?"

"Quite well."

"Well, Itash has brought the other girl over here. Cleo has followed, and Cleo paid me a visit the day before yesterday. She gave me a hint and I verified it. She is coming here again this morning."

"Do you trust her?" Stoneham asked doubtfully. "Do you think it really likely that a man like Itash would have told her secrets."

"Of course he wouldn't," Grant agreed. "But this is the point. Itash has a habit of which he is ignorant. He talks in his sleep. Cleo admits that she thought nothing of it at first, that she did not even listen. Then some of the things he said struck her as being strange. Finally she understood. He was worrying over a failure of his to keep secret two great contracts for steel given last year and the year before. I followed this up. It happened to be rather in my line. What about this for a bombshell, Dan? Japan bought steel plates enough in Germany during the last two years to build every scrap of naval armament to which she was entitled. She also bought from different firms in America, some in the name of China, and some in her own name, three times the same quantity of steel, all of which was shipped."

"But say, how could she get away with a thing like that?" Stoneham asked incredulously.

"Largely bluff. The steel plates from Germany she declared faulty and announced her intention of using them for factory construction. Germany, with unusual complacency, actually admitted at the last meeting of the Limitation of Armaments that the plates were unfit for battleships. This is the first little hint Mademoiselle Cleo has given me, Dan, and by the time I get my dispatches in from Japan—I have a good man out there, thank God—I think I shall be able to give the Limitation of Armaments Conference a shock. Cleo has a few other little matters to tell me about, too."

"Say, this is great!" Stoneham exclaimed. "Pity you couldn't have got her to make a complete disclosure while she was about it."

"I did my best," Grant assured him. "I offered her everything in the world except my hand and fortune, and I don't think she'd have accepted those. She's simply crazy over this fellow Itash. She's going slowly in case he relents."

STONEHAM, with a start, sat upright in his chair. A sudden recollection had flashed into his brain.

"My God!" he cried. "Whatever have I been thinking about? What did you say her name was?"

"I've never heard her called anything but Mademoiselle Cleo. What about her? Don't tell me anything's happened already!"

Stoneham caught up one of the newspapers from the table and pointed to a paragraph on the first page.

"Haven't you read that, man?" he demanded.

"Haven't looked at a paper," was the feverish reply. "I hadn't finished my mail when you came in."

Grant read the paragraph eagerly. It occupied only a short space but the headlines were thick and prominent.

ATTEMPTED MURDER ON BROADWAY

Famous French Danseuse Shot by a Rival

At a few minutes before two o'clock this morning, what seems to have been a deliberate attempt at murder took place on the corner of Broadway and Thirty-seventh Street. It appeared that Count Itash, who is here on an official mission to the Embassy of his country at Washington, was leaving Mason's restaurant with Mademoiselle Yvonne, a well known French dancer, when two shots were fired from the crowd of passers-by. Mademoiselle Yvonne was slightly wounded but was able to return home in a taxicab. The assailant was distinctly seen by several of the passers-by, but managed to escape during the confusion. Her identity is established, however, and her arrest is momentarily expected. She is said to be known as Mademoiselle Cleo, of Monaco.

"Fool!" Grant exclaimed. "We are done, Dan. The police will have her, and if I know anything of Mr. Cornelius Blum, she won't see daylight again until it's too late."

His companion was thoughtful for a moment.

"I'm not sure," he reflected, "that the best thing in the world for us won't be to have her safely under arrest. Blum's gang can't get at her in prison anyhow. And she can be seen there."

"Blum has a terrific pull," Grant reminded him.

Stoneham moved toward the telephone.

"I'll ring up Police Headquarters and see if she's been arrested," he announced. "I know a man there who'll look after this for us."

His hand was already upon the telephone when there was an imperative knock at the door. He glanced around. Grant rose to his feet. Before either of them could say a word, the door was thrown open and closed again. Cleo stood there, with her back to it, holding tightly to the handle, panting for breath.

"They're after me," she cried. "There's scarcely a minute. Ring up Itash. Quick! 1817 Plaza."

Stoneham asked at once for the number.

"What do you want to say to Itash?" Grant demanded. "Tell me the rest quickly. You're French. Itash is in League with the Germans."

"Bah!" she sobbed. "He could be in league with the devil if he would come back to me. Listen. I ask him. He shall hear what I know. Then he shall choose. He shall take me and my silence and leave her forever, or I will kill her and I will tell you his secrets."

"Is that 1817 Plaza?" Stoneham inquired.

"It is Count Itash who speaks," was the slow rejoinder.

"Mademoiselle Cleo is here in 940, Hotel Great Central, the apartment of Mr. Grant Slattery. She desires you to come."

Cleo sprang across the room. She snatched the receiver in her own hand. She broke into a stream of incoherent French, rocking herself back and forth all the time, as though distracted with pain.

"I heard you speak those things," she cried. "I know the great secrets. I know that they would give me the price of a kingdom to have me tell. Very well, then, very well. Come here, then, before the police can touch me. Come to me here. Give up Yvonne forever, and there shall be a seal on my lips as though the finger of the Virgin rested there. I have never deceived you, I am always faithful. I am always true. I am racked with pain and jealousy, Itash. Take me back. I have spoken the word. It shall be as though Her finger rested upon my lip."

She threw down the receiver. She turned toward them with a smile of triumph upon her lips.

"He comes," she announced. "Now we shall see!"

A dramatic death at sea and the turning point in Grant's life form part of the exciting conclusion of "The Wrath to Come"—in May EVERYBODY'S, out April 15.

Chinese Horses

Have You Ever Felt the Fascination of a House—Your Own? Miss Maxwell Felt It Strongly—in Fact It Dominated Her Life. Here is a Character Sketch Distinguished by Its Quiet Charm

By Hugh Walpole

Author of "Jeremy"

MISS HENRIETTA MAXWELL, when she was about thirty-five years of age, suffered suddenly from misfortune. She had been for many years quite alone in the world, an only child whose parents had been killed in a carriage accident when she was ten years of age. Then she had acquired an almost masculine independence and self-reliance. Until lately things had gone well with her. Without being rich, she had had, until that fatal August of 1914, quite enough to live upon. She had taken a house in St. John's Wood, not far from Lords, with an adorable garden, paneled dining-room, and a long music room at the back. She had soon loved this house so much, so deeply, that she had bought it. Then, when the war came, she threw herself completely into it, nursed in France, worked with desperate seriousness and the severity of a brigadier general over those whom she commanded.

Toward the end of 1917 she broke down, had insomnia, came back to England to rest, found it a much longer business than she had expected, and was not really her old self again until after the Armistice.

Then Miss Maxwell discovered that her finances were queer. In the first place it cost twice as much to live as it had done. Her little staff of three were loyal and affectionate, but they had to be fed. Some investments into which she was led by a kindly but rather feckless friend had done anything but well. She was warm-hearted and hated to refuse the adorable spare bedroom to a friend, with the result that there was always some one coming or going. People dropped in for meals in the jolliest and most unexpected way.

There was nothing that she loved so much as to hear people praise the house. Some of the praise, she knew, was insincere, but every now and then she heard that real catch in the throat, the "Oh, my dear, but it's lovely!" when the first glimpse was caught of the corner of the library with the long windows looking out on the trees, the dark blue ceiling, the white bookshelves, the gold mirror, and the very best picture she had, a lovely Clausen watercolor, cottages, a silver-gray pool and faintly blue hills.

In her own heart of hearts she thought that nobody else's books looked quite so perfect in their shelves as did hers. They seemed to like the room that they were in. They wanted to show her that they did, and there was so much sun in that library that although their backs might be dimmed just a little, their hearts were thoroughly warm, and some of the most cynical books in the world became quite amiable and kindly from living in that particular corner of that library. In fact, after reading Stendhal one winter very seriously, she moved him, bag and baggage, from the rather chilly corner by the door and put him in the sun-drenched spot near the window and hoped it would do him good.

She adored the house, every nook and cranny of it, from the basement, which ought to have been dark and was not, up to the two little rooms at the top which were so hot in fine weather that nobody could sleep there and so cold in the winter that you had to wear a fur coat when you went into them. But the house on the whole was of a fine temperature and it had a way of always keeping one warm room on a cold day and one really cool one in the height of the summer, so that it surprised you. In fact it looked after you and seemed to take the greatest care that it should have as few dilapidations as possible.

Best of all was its color. Miss Maxwell adored the color. She said what was true enough, that there were a great many gray days in London and that you couldn't have too much orange, too much purple, and too many burning reds. That is not to say that she went in for all the eccentric colors of which people are so fond to-day, so that you do your dining-room in black and orange, and for the first month it looks like the back cloth of an Eastern musical comedy, and the second month, it looks like the shop of a decorator who is not quite able to make both ends meet, and the third month it looks so shabby and dusty that you have to change all its colors and start over again.

No, she was not eccentric. She had silver-gray wallpapers and white bookcases. Then she had also certain things she had found abroad, some bronzes, two splendid Chinese horses, some Japanese prints, some Spanish shawls, and upstairs, in a little dressing-room next her bedroom, a beautiful little collection of English pottery.

ALL these things she adored with a personal, individual adoration. She didn't understand the people to whom possession meant nothing at all. The Chinese horses and a Wedgwood bowl and two Jane Austen first editions and the Clausen picture were quite as personal to her as certain of her friends; a great deal more personal than most of her acquaintances. But all these things were sunk in the final adorable charm of the house itself. The house was her friend, her counselor, her consoler in distress, her doctor when she was ill, her companion when she couldn't sleep, some one who loved her and was intensely grateful for her own love. All this she felt when the horrible time came when she suddenly had to let the house and leave it because she couldn't afford to live there until times were better.

She was successful in her let, that is, she discovered a very pretty girl who loved the house at first sight, who was apparently quiet and orderly, who didn't keep dogs and didn't care for dancing. (So she said.) She was so pretty, this Miss March, that it really was charming to see her in the house. She was ready also to take on the little staff of three and she told Miss Maxwell that she would be delighted to see her whenever she liked to call.

The actual leaving the house, therefore, was not so terrible as Miss Maxwell, had expected. It was horrible, of course, but Miss Maxwell went down to Eastbourne, sat beside the sea, and thought about that pretty creature moving in and out, up and down, and counted the months until things would be better, her investments would go up, and she would be able to go back again. That was at first, but gradually, day by day, she felt more and more that the house was longing for her. She suddenly, on the wildest spur of the moment, when she was shopping and was intending to go back to her lodging and have her lunch, took a train up to London instead, walked through the dusky afternoon to St. John's Wood, looked through the little gates, rang the bell, asked if Miss March were at home, was told by a severe-looking woman that she was not, and crept back to Eastbourne again.

The sight of the severe-looking woman made things very much worse. What had happened to the dear little house-parlormaid who loved everything in the house quite as much as Miss Maxwell? This woman evidently loved nothing and nobody. She wrote to Miss March and received a rather stiff little letter in return saying that the staff had been added to, that one of the water pipes had burst, and that a sister of Miss March had caught a severe cold by sleeping in the little room under the roof. Miss Maxwell, feeling exactly as though she had had a daughter who had gone to her first ball and been found by a number of people to be plain and awkward, came up to London and saw Miss March.

The girl didn't seem so pretty as she had been. She was discontented and pouted. St. John's Wood was such a long way from everywhere and she did hope that she hadn't mislaid any of the books but one never knew what a friend would do when one's back was turned, and it was strange how little conscience people had about books anyway. Some strange people came in to tea while Miss Maxwell was there; loud, noisy people who cared nothing, Miss Maxwell was certain, for beautiful things, probably laughed at the Chinese horses and thought books were stuffy. The end of this was that Miss Maxwell took two little rooms just round the corner—poky little rooms with a slatternly landlady, but from their windows you had a view of the house, could look right into the garden, and even, if you hung out far enough, could see into the library.

WE ALL know what obsessions can be, and there is nothing stranger in life than the very little distance that is needed to lend enchantment. Miss Maxwell had always adored her house, but seen as it was now, in fragments, with a colored lawn, a brick wall, and several trees defending it, it was magical. Try as she would, Miss Maxwell could not concentrate upon anything else. She had many friends in London and, to grant them full justice, they were as friendly to her now as they had been in the days of her prosperity. She had a babies' crèche in which she was interested and the old book shops and curiosity shops still fascinated her although she had so little money to spend in them; but gradually, week by week, day by day, and at last hour by hour, the house led her away. She was a sensible woman, a modern woman, not of the kind to take sentimental passions and to allow them to tear her to pieces; this thing nevertheless completely overrode her.

Had she had more confidence in Miss March, had she not been so persistently aware of the austerity of the female servant, this passion might not have grown upon her; but it was exactly as though some nice girl whom she knew had made an unfortunate marriage, was being bullied by a brute of a husband, and her tears and even her cries could be realized from Miss Maxwell's rooms. The house protested. Of course it did.

After a while, when summer came down upon London and all the trees were rich and full, and flowers were scenting the byways of St. John's Wood, Miss Maxwell became afraid of her obsession. "You are really getting queer," she said to herself one evening as she looked at herself in the glass, "and must look out or you will be doing something silly." What she had been doing that afternoon was practically to press her nose against the railings and look through a rather dusty laurel into the garden beyond. There in the garden, very pretty in a pink summer frock, was Miss March giving tea to a rather stout gentleman with a round face like a moon. Miss Maxwell, as she peered through, soon discovered two things—one, that the gentleman with the moon face was rich, and another, that he was in love with Miss March. She judged the first because of his clothes, his self-satisfied air, and his gestures, which were as though he was scattering gold upon the grass and didn't mind if the sparrows ran away with most of it. For the other, there could be no mistake. His eyes, as Miss Maxwell told herself, were liquid with love and when Miss March very daintily gave him some sugar in his tea he didn't look at the sugar at all but only at Miss March, which, in a gentleman who was quite obviously fond of his food, was proof positive.

Miss Maxwell was ashamed of herself for gazing through the railings like a street boy and a policeman floating past looked at her very suspiciously. She was, however, so respectable and fine-looking a woman that she ran no serious risk.

That evening, having a gay old woman to supper, she discussed the affair, and the first thing that the gay old woman said was: "Why, my dear, if he's rich and in love with that young woman, he'll soon propose to her, she will accept him, and then leave the house."

"Why should they leave the house?" asked Miss Maxwell, her heart beating fast at the mere idea.

"Why, you don't suppose," said the gay old woman, "that a man who's rich and fat will live in a poky little house in St. John's Wood! Oh, my dear! I beg your pardon," she went on; "of course I don't mean 'poky.' Of course it's a jewel of a house but not the thing at all for married people who will have motor cars and large dinner parties and possibly an aëroplane or two."

This idea was terrific. The one thought that Miss Maxwell had was that Miss March should leave the house. She didn't in the least mind at the moment who took

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it next. It might be herself. A rich old uncle in South Africa might die, or shares go up, or she herself might discover a new sort of radium, or the heavens might fall. The great thing was for Miss March to go.

"Do you think," said the gay old woman, "that he has proposed to her yet?"

"Oh, no!" said Miss Maxwell. "The way she was giving him sugar proved that. If he had proposed, she would have been much less interested. I am quite sure that she wants him to propose."

"Well, then," said her friend, "if she wants him to propose and he's in love with her, there you are then."

THE next stage in this story was that Miss Maxwell actually met and spoke to the stout gentleman. She was always hanging about the little leafy street that ran past the gate of her house, and one afternoon, about six, the gentleman suddenly came out of the gate in a great hurry, his face rather flushed, ran straight into her and nearly knocked her down. He was dreadfully distressed about this. He was of the old-fashioned school, now nearly extinct, that believes in courtesy to ladies, and his hand rested upon her arm for quite a long time while he wished to make sure that she suffered no sort of damage and that she bore him no grudge.

Miss Maxwell laughed in her frank, charming way.

"Harm! No, I should think not," she said. "I'm very glad to have met you."

"Glad to have met me," he stammered, looking very foolish.

"Yes," she said, "because as a matter of fact that is my house. You have been going into it a great deal lately. I love it more than anything else on earth. I had to let it, but I simply hated doing it. I'm always wondering how it's getting on and now you can tell me."

"How it's getting on?" he repeated, in a puzzled way. "Why, it's all right, I think."

"Do you go into it much?" she asked.

They were by this time quite unconsciously walking down the road together.

"Do you go up to the very top of it and down to the very bottom of it? Are the Chinese horses all right? Of course I ought to have put them away, and the Wedgwood, and a lot of the books, but I simply couldn't bear that the house should be without them. I did send Jane Austen to the bank."

"Send Jane Austen to the bank?" he repeated. He was gazing at her with admiration. He was obviously a gentleman on whom the other sex made a strong appeal.

"Yes, my first editions of her. They are very good and worth a great deal of money, but they're worth much more to me. Any amount of coin. You don't collect first editions, I suppose?"

"Well, no, not exactly," he said stammering.

"How do you mean 'not exactly'?" said Miss Maxwell sharply. "You either collect first editions or you don't. You can't do it half and half."

"No, I see what you mean," he answered laughing. "That was stupid of me. But I am stupid."

She liked that. It was extraordinary how intimate you could become with some people in a very short time.

"You like Miss March very much, don't you?" she said.

"How do you know that?" he asked, blushing. He blushed very often.

"I saw you having tea with her on the lawn," she answered. "I looked through the railings."

"Yes, I do like her very much. She is very pretty. I'm thinking of asking her to be my wife. I want a wife," he went on confidently, just as though he had said he wanted a new hat. "I'm forty-two and have been a widower for seven years, and every year it has been more and more difficult."

"What has?" she asked him.

"Being a widower," he answered.

"That's not a very good reason for marrying Miss March," she said.

"Oh, but I do like her most immensely," he answered. "She's so pretty and kind."

"Pretty, she is," said Miss Maxwell. "What you have to ask yourself is as to whether she will be kind when she's hooked you. There's such a difference before and after."

"Hooked me?" He stopped. They were near St. John's Wood station. "What a horrible idea!"

"Well, of course she wants to marry you," said Miss Maxwell. "Very soon she'll not be as young as she is now, and you're rich and I think good-natured."

"How do you know so much about me?" he asked, staring at her in amazement.

"I'm observant," said Miss Maxwell.

"I should just think you are," he said, looking at her quite obviously ablaze with admiration.

"Tell me one thing," said Miss Maxwell. "If you propose to her and she marries you, will you live in this house?"

"I should think not. As it is, she says it's too small for her and miles away from anywhere."

"Too small for her, and miles away from anywhere?" Miss Maxwell retorted indignantly. "She is no more worthy of that house than she is of you. However, I hope she'll marry you," she added.

On that they parted and it was quite astonishing how often afterward they met. And yet it was perhaps not altogether astonishing, for Miss Maxwell was so often in that road and the gentleman, whose name was Mr. Herbert Willings, had reached that stage in courtship when very frequent visits are necessary. Moreover, he had that nature that demands a sympathetic friend.

There was a little public garden round the corner, a very small one and a dusty, but it had in it a bench and upon this bench Miss Maxwell and Mr. Willings used to sit and he poured out to her his longings, his hopes, and asked her endless questions as to what she thought about Miss March's character. Because, after all, he was forty-two, and behind his ardor was a natural middle-aged caution.

She herself was pulled in two opposite directions. She was as certain as she had ever been of anything that Miss March would make him very miserable. She had a kind of tenderness for him, he was so childish and so naïf, and she really didn't want him to be miserable for the rest of his days, as he undoubtedly would be if he married Miss March. On the other hand it might be good for him to be less comfortable, less stout, and have to face for once the realities of life. And then she wanted him to marry, she wanted it terribly.

She tried to make him understand a little what she felt about the house. She made him pay special visits to various rooms into which it was quite evident Miss March had not intended him to enter. She asked him all sorts of questions about the hang of the curtains, whether the carpets were brushed, how many pieces of china had been broken, and he was caught once by Miss March counting the cups and saucers behind the glass case in her bedroom; and this, as he told Miss Maxwell, made her extremely angry. He had never seen Miss March angry before, and quite frankly he hadn't liked it.

Miss Maxwell soon perceived that he would never have her feeling about the house. He simply didn't understand those things. A picture, if it had plenty of color, wasn't bad on a wall, and a row of books, were they nicely bound, looked pleasant in a bookcase. He had to confess that he didn't read very much himself, but liked a good detective story when he was sleepy after a hard day's work. He thought the Chinese horses rather absurd and treated her to quite a long lecture on the Yellow Peril.

The weeks advanced and at last the time arrived when he intended to propose. He asked her advice very often as to the proper time and place in which to make his venture. She told him that in her opinion nothing was better than tea-time on the lawn, the shadows stealing across the grass, sparrows twittering, flowers sleepily closing their eyes and plenty of little pink cakes on the table. And then as fate and the English climate would have it, the rain came down. Although it was July, it was cold as December. Tea on the lawn was impossible and a whole ten days went by when Mr. Willings had so nasty a cold that proposing was a physical impossibility. Then the fine day came.

MISS MAXWELL knew very well that the day had arrived. When she saw the sun splashing across her carpet in the morning, the first thing that she said to herself was, "Now he'll propose to her to-day."

They had come, without spoken word, to a kind of agreement that they would meet in the little dusty park on most fine days somewhere around five in the evening: that is to say, if she were free, she would go, and if he were free he would go, without any very definite agreement, and it was surprising how often accident led them in the same direction.

To-day, on this perfectly lovely afternoon, about half-past five, she was sitting on the bench watching the sparrows and waiting with terrific emotion for his appearance. She was sure that he would come to-day. To-day of all days he would need a confidant, some one into whose sympathetic ear he could pour every word of the wonderful occasion. Had she a sympathetic ear? She was not so sure. She felt in some mysterious way guilty. They would not be happy together. There was not the least chance of it. Miss March would lead him such a dance as Miss Maxwell trembled to contemplate. But what did that matter, compared with the house?

As she sat there, she realized that what was happening on this wonderful afternoon was that the house was being given back to her. He must propose and she must accept him, and they, being engaged, released the house. It was as simple as an easy sum in algebra. The house being released, in some way or other she would hold on to it. She couldn't see now in what way that would be, but never again, she swore, digging the end of her parasol violently into the dusty soil, would she let it be delivered over to the mercies of an unsympathetic tenant. After all, she could live in one of the small rooms at the top of the house on bread and cheese and open the other rooms one after another as her investments went up. She could feast her eyes on the Chinese horses, the darlings, and go over the house at night, touching the pictures with her hands, listening to every piece of furniture as it whispered to her "Good night," see the ghostly gleam of the china, hear the faint rustle of the curtains against the half open window.

THERE was a step. She looked up. There was Mr. Willings, more flushed in the face than usual, greatly agitated. He sat down beside her, and then to her surprise, instead of bursting into a torrent of explanation, he said nothing.

"Well," she broke in at last.

He still said nothing.

"Tell me that she's accepted you," she cried, "and then give me all the details."

"She hasn't accepted me."

"She hasn't?"

"No."

"Good heavens, what a fool!" Miss Maxwell, in her agitation, turned full upon him. "You don't mean to tell me she's refused you? Why, it's exactly what she wants! She won't get such another chance in a hundred years. She's going off. She's got some money, of course, but not nearly enough, and you're so kind."

Her expressions were mixed, but her meaning was clear.

"She hasn't refused me."

"She hasn't refused you?"

"No."

"Nor accepted you?"

"No."

"Then she's going to wait and think it over."

"No, not that either."

"Then . . . Good heavens! Mr. Willings, tell me what you mean. I can't endure the suspense any longer."

"What I mean is simple enough."

His expression was almost sulky, as he turned toward her.

"What I mean is that I haven't proposed"

Miss Maxwell was so bitterly disappointed that she could say nothing.

"I haven't proposed," he went on doggedly, "and I don't intend to. I'm never going to propose. I don't love her. I don't want her to be my wife."

Miss Maxwell rose bravely out of her disappointment. Curiosity held her again.

"You're not going to propose, and you don't love her? You loved her that day all right when I pressed my nose against the railings. I could see your love oozing out all over the lawn from behind miles of shrubbery. How can you change so quickly?"

"I might have loved her," he said, his face bright crimson, "if I hadn't run into you in the road; but you can't love two people at once—or I can't."

She was too utterly amazed to do anything but gasp.

"Why, man, you don't mean to say—" she began.

"Yes, I do," he went on, staring at her. "I fell in love with you after the very first day, and it's gone on increasing ever since. How can a chit of a thing like that compare with you, with your wisdom and your kindness, and your fun, and—and—your beauty."

"My beauty?" said Miss Maxwell.

"Yes, your beauty," he said, stammering in his agitation. "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. Your quiet gray eyes——"

"Oh, please, Mr. Willings!"

Miss Maxwell wanted to laugh, looked at the piteous doglike expression in his large round eyes, and was touched with tenderness.

"Now do think for a moment. Here we are in a dusty little park in St. John's Wood and we're both middle-aged and nothing could make us romantic any longer. There is a beautiful young girl with all her life in front of her. I'm a withered old thing and you know it in yourself. Besides, I'm in love with somebody else."

His face fell, so it was tragic to see.

"In love with somebody else?"

"Yes, with my house. I can't think of anything or anybody but my house."

"Why, then, don't you see," he cried triumphantly, "you shall have your house. We'll turn that girl out of it and you shall live in it for the rest of your days. You'll have to put up with me, of course, but I'll do my best not to be in the way."

They were both such charming people that a small sparrow that had been hopping about in a businesslike fashion on the path, stopped a moment and looked at them in sheer admiration, with his head on one side.

The dazzling vision blinded her. She didn't love him, no, not the least little bit. She looked at him, even in that moment of amazement, quite clearly and dispassionately, and saw how fat and bald he would be, even in another five years, and heard him snore in his sleep, and felt his heavy tread as he came toward her when she was tired and inquired solicitously whether she wanted anything, and saw the silly smile of happy satisfaction in his face when he bought her a new hat, and perceived precisely his air of touching proprietorship as he walked across a well-filled restaurant toward the table that he had so carefully chosen. She saw all this, but she saw on the other hand quite clearly a life of ease and affluence, no more struggles, no more watching your shares go down, no more wondering what she could do to get a new dress without paying for it, and, above all, the house, the house, the house—hers for ever and ever. Yes, but his too. He didn't care for the house; he would pretend to, but he would never be able to hide it from her. He would take it all in the wrong way. He would insult the Chinese horses by ignorantly praising them. He would break her china and tell her that he could easily find her another piece. He would buy her a picture to hang in the house and it would be an awful thing. Nevertheless, she was deeply touched.

"I can't tell you," she said, "what a compliment you've paid me. We'll be friends always, won't we, whatever happens?"

His face fell directly.

"Oh, I know what it means when you say that," he said. "I don't want us to be friends. I want you to marry me."

"But I don't love you."

"You will grow to care for me," he said. "I'm sure you will. I'll be ever so patient."

How many thousands upon thousands of people had said those very words before? How many thousands of people were probably saying those words at that very moment throughout the world?

She looked at him, looked away, said at last: "Give me a week. We won't meet for a week, nor write, nor anything at all. Be here this same time to-day week, rain or shine, and I will give you my answer; but remember, whatever my answer is, that I shall never forget how kind you have been. I shall always be grateful."

She got up then and left him.

THERE followed then the most critical week of her life. She sat in her little room, looking over at the garden, and fought her severest battle. No one would ever propose to her again. Of that she was quite sure. There was very little prospect that, left alone by herself, she would ever find life very easy. Life was not very easy any more to middle-aged women with very small incomes and no talents. She would struggle and struggle and later on perhaps ill-health would come. She would be alone in the world and the grim finale was more than she, however brave she might be, could fully contemplate. He would always be kind, much too kind. She would dominate him utterly. When she was cross (and sometimes she was very cross indeed) he would be sorry and go out and buy her something and beg her pardon for some fault that she herself had committed. There would always be somebody to look after her. When she was ill, there would be every attention. They would go abroad

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and see the world. Most of all, she would not only live in the house but she would be able to do things to it, make it perfect and beautiful and wonderful, give it all the little attentions it needed, help it and strengthen it and make it lovely and at last die in it.

Yes, but he would be there. Every moment of their life together, he would be misunderstanding the house. She would never, never be able to make him see it. There was nothing that she would do for it that he wouldn't misunderstand. She would be forever fighting for it, trying to keep it out of his hands, trying to prevent him messing it about, and if she went away for a week only, she would be haunted all the time by the knowledge that he would be moving the furniture, trying to make it better for her, and making it infinitely worse. However strongly she dominated him, she would never prevent his personality from pervading it, and the inevitable moment would surely come when she would implore him to leave it and probably find that the only thing to do was for them both to go and live somewhere else.

Common-sense readers of this little story will say at once that it is fantastically impossible. No middle-aged spinster with no future would surrender a comfortable, safe and assured life for such a reason. It was not fantastic to Miss Maxwell. The beauty of that house was the test for her of all the beauty in the world, the only test, and it had to be kept pure and immaculate, and if it were not so, the color of the world would change. Nothing would ever be quite immaculate again.

That was a terrible week. She sat at her window, looking over at the house, struggling, thinking first one thing and then another. Then one evening, just the day before she was to meet him again, a marvelous thing happened. It was a lovely summer evening, with a half moon, crocus-colored, rising ever so gently into the faint blue sky. She suddenly determined that she would go and see Miss March.

She rang the bell and stood waiting, trembling with excitement. The horse-faced servant opened the door. Miss March was out. Might Miss Maxwell go just for a moment to the room at the top of the house and look for a little box that she had left there and forgotten? The servant hesitated and then yielded.

Through the rooms Miss Maxwell went. They were soaked with the evening light, the light through which she loved most to see them. The whole house cried out with protest as she went. Ugly things lay everywhere, hideous new novels with bright yellow labels. In the dining-room the remains of a horrible meal not yet cleared away. In the beautiful little blue-walled drawing-room there was a loathsome Pekingese that whimpered at her like a child as she entered. On the sofa and the chairs there were those bright new purple and orange cushions that she so thoroughly detested. On the carpet on the way up to the bedroom some one had spilled something that lay like a stain upon the whole house's decorum, and the bedroom—the mess that it was! Even the horse-faced servant felt something of this and said that it was wonderful how perpetually on the move Miss March had been.

In the little room at the top of the house there was desolation. No one had touched it for months. It was dusty and neglected and forlorn. Miss Maxwell looked out of the litle attic window and saw the moon and the pale green sky and the dark trees coming up to her like old friends from the dusky garden. She leaned out and forgot everything. Her hands pressed on the little wooden sill. Her eyes filled with repentant tears. She heard the servant's voice.

"I'M THINKING Miss March won't be here much longer," the servant said. "She is considering giving up the rest of the lease, she tells me. It don't suit her. Too far out for 'er friends. I'm sure I don't wonder," she ended with a sniff.

Miss Maxwell turned round, her heart beating with joy.

"It is too far out for her," she cried triumphantly. "It's not the house for her at all. She doesn't understand it."

The servant looked at Miss Maxwell with a stern pity.

"Maybe, miss," was all she said.

As they went downstairs the house seemed to gather around them and Miss Maxwell felt as if some one put a hand on her shoulder and a voice whispered in her ear: "We're so glad you're coming back. We don't want anybody here but you."

On the following afternoon Miss Maxwell refused Mr. Willings.

A Novel Complete in This Issue

The Long Call

Love Fights for Life in the Canadian North Against Greed and Treachery Intrenched in the Law

By Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Illustrations by Stockton Mulford

HAD Paul Norcott known anything of Peggy Thorpe's early history he would hardly have dared oppose his will to hers. But Paul saw her only as a week-end guest at Banff and never suspected her untamable determination, whereas any one of a hundred men in Alberta could have displayed prints of her ruthless heels.

When Peggy was eight she decided to wear overalls. Her scandalized father forbade it. Her pleas that she could ride better and keep cleaner in her various activities about the ranch had no effect. John Thorpe had never seen a woman in overalls. He returned from town the next Saturday night to find Peggy's blue-clad legs astride a pony. He told her to go to bed but when he entered the living-room of the ranch house he found all her cotton dresses cut into strips and piled in the middle of the floor.

John Thorpe was not the only man who fell victim to Peggy's determination to get what she wanted. Ranch hands gave up the struggle long before her father did. Even a lock on the bunkhouse door had failed to keep her from their possessions.

At eighteen Peggy turned an excess of energy, her untamable determination and the charm of a vibrant personality to the upbuilding of the family fortune. The cattle ranch had long ceased to be the center of the Thorpe activities. Wheat lands, coal lands, an undeveloped oil property, timber, farm mortgages, stock in a dozen business enterprises, all these John Thorpe had acquired since emigrating from the States in the middle '90s.

He and Peggy had moved into Calgary before she was twelve, but six years later the rancher began to feel the strain of city life and a multitude of details. A severe cold and threatened pneumonia sent him to bed on the eve of several important meetings and before the fever brought delirium, and afterwards while he babbled, Peggy learned his plans and wishes.

Weeks later, when the doctor permitted a report, she told her father what she had done. John Thorpe listened without comment until the end.

"It's more'n I'd 'a' been able to do myself," was all he said when she concluded.

A month afterward, when he was able to get the details from his business associates, he began to see that he could do far worse than take Peggy into partnership.

Meanwhile Peggy did not forget that she was a woman. She loved good clothes and quickly learned that she had to go East to get what she wanted. She was passionately fond of dancing and she never had been known to adorn a wall. Her room was as distinctively feminine as any other girl's. Even in the heat of a business argument there was never a suggestion of the masculine in her manner.

Her attitude toward social acquaintances differed little from that toward ranch foremen. Aspiring youths—and there were many—were never played with or kept dangling.

"It's not square!" she exclaimed indignantly when a girl envied her opportunities in the age-old game.

One day John Thorpe went from his doctor's office to that of his lawyer. The lawyer protested at one clause in the will.

"Peggy's the sole heir," the father retorted. "Why should I tie her hands with a bunch of executors? You're talking yourself out of a lot of work, man, if she ever hears what you think."

Two months later when the will was read Peggy shed her first public tears. Even at the funeral she had remained dry-eyed, but this testimonial of her father's faith broke down her determination to present a front as courageous as his own had been in those last weeks.

AFTER a decent interval the inevitable swarm of suitors came, and again the range was from bankers to ranch foremen. Peggy was brutal or charmingly compassionate, as the occasion required.

Hewart Baring-Smith, a remittance man whose enviable war record was overshadowed by a more or less sensationally lurid reputation, but whose charm of manner was undeniable, was most persistent. For a time Peggy evaded him skilfully and then one evening she appeared to be in sudden and disconcerted retreat. Baring-Smith stepped into the trap boldly and confidently.

"Listen to me a moment," Peggy said sharply. "You're no better than a plain, ordinary thief. I'd as soon be a thief as a parasite on a rich wife. I don't blame you altogether. Your family never gave you a chance to make a man of yourself. About the only way you can earn a living is to marry one, and even then you wouldn't earn it. Don't come to me with any such lopsided proposition again."

Jed Hermon, widower and father of four children, whose age and financial history were about the same as John Thorpe's, a man whose huge bulk was clothed in much the same manner as when he had first homesteaded in Alberta, proposed to Peggy in her office.

"I'm making this a plain business proposition," he said. "If we put what you've got and what I've got together there's nothing we can't do. And you need a steadying hand now that your dad's gone. You're reckless at times and you're going to make a big mistake some day."

"Let you know tomorrow," Peggy answered in her crispest business tone. "Sorry I can't discuss it further with you today but I have an engagement."

After Jed's departure Peggy immediately sat down before a typewriter and wrote her answer:

Mr. Jed Hermon,
Calgary, Alberta.

DEAR SIR:

In regard to the proposition you made in our interview today, I have decided not to accept it. You put it as a business matter and as such I have considered it. A co-partnership presupposes equality in assets. A rough inventory shows it would be impossible for us to adjust our holdings on such a basis.

Yours very truly,
MARGARET THORPE.

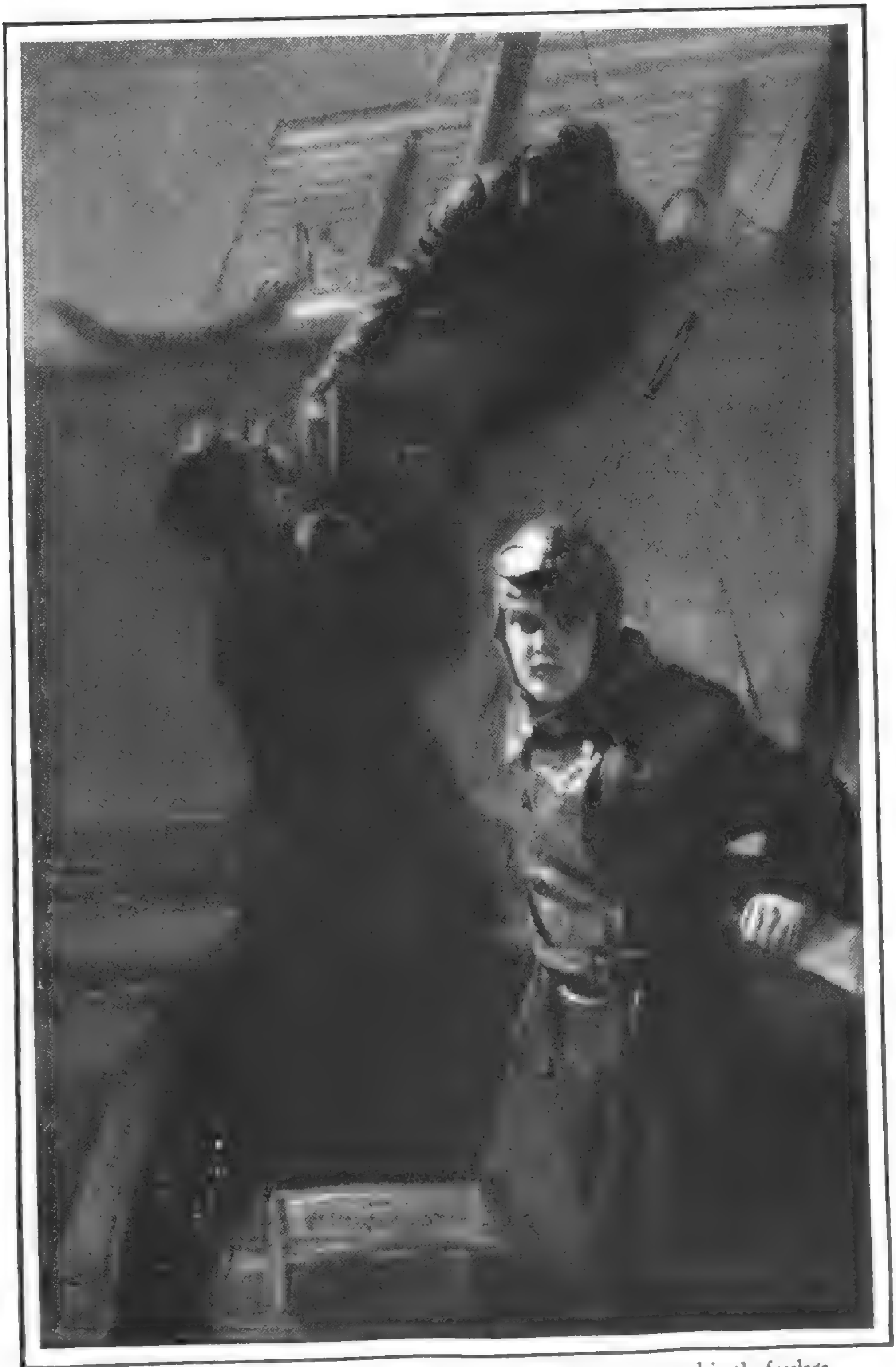
Lester Cole, foreman of the old home ranch, had worshiped her for years. After a three-day blizzard had imprisoned them in the ranch house during one of Peggy's visits they stood together at a living-room window watching the dying storm in the dusk of an early evening.

Lester had been a ranch hand when Peggy donned overalls. In childhood she had often climbed into his lap to hear stories and to her he was still the big, kind-hearted, steady, lovable puncher. It was only natural that when a spasm of pain incited by memories inevitably associated with the home ranch had seized her she should grasp his hand and hold it tightly. The next instant she was crushed in his arms.

For a moment she did not struggle. The passionate pressure brought a certain ecstasy due solely to the fact that here was something absolutely genuine and sincere.

"Les!" she cried as she tore herself free. "I never—I never suspected. I wish—oh, I wish I was back in overalls again! Why, Les, you're the last man in the world I'd want to hurt! Forgive me, Les, please!"

The memory of that evening haunted Peggy for a long time. She avoided the home ranch, for she did not wish to see the hurt in Les Cole's eyes, but most of all she thought of what the years must have meant to him, of what love must mean to any one who loves without hope.



A low whistle directed them to the airplane, and the supplies were stowed in the fuselage.

The following summer Peggy formed the habit of running up to Banff for an occasional week-end. Her first trip was for the rest but the dancing drew her back. She discovered, too, that something else had attracted her.

In the early fall she met Paul Norcott. The introduction had been casual, in a large, laughing group, and it was not until he asked her to dance that she gave him more than a passing thought. Even then it was his dancing that attracted her and not until the next morning when she met him strolling along the river bank did he begin to stand out from all the young men she had known.

PAUL was a little too rugged to be handsome, though one got the impression rather from his manner, which suggested restrained energy, than from his strength. He smiled when he saw Peggy but as he walked beside her two wrinkles persisted in rising above his nose and occasionally his eyes darted impatiently across the river or up at the peaks beyond.

"You act like a caged wolf," she said.

"I feel like something caged," he answered with startling fierceness.

"But you're not—not caged."

"I am. I'm in the worst kind of a cage. I'm fed and clothed and given most everything I want except the right to do as I please."

Peggy was mystified. There was every indication of a violent revolt and of a corroding bitterness.

"Why don't you open the door?" she asked.

"It's locked."

"You look as if you could bend a few bars."

"I can't when my hands are tied. What do you say to getting up a party and going for a ride today, up into the mountains?"

He had clearly indicated that the subject was closed, but Peggy was a woman.

"I rode for years when it was just hard work," she said. "I came up here for a rest, and to dance."

"You mean you lived on a ranch?" he asked eagerly.

"I do still, when I feel like it."

Norcott stopped and faced her. His face was beaming.

"Lord, you're lucky!" he exclaimed. "That's one of the things I've wanted to do all my life, only I never could. There are a lot of outdoor things I'd have liked but I just got tastes of them in vacations and then never the real thing. Tell me about it."

Peggy told him some things, those which would disabuse his mind of the usual erroneous ideas of wild adventure in a life which was mostly hard work, but she was unable to curb his interest or to turn him back to his own problem. In a short time she forgot the impetuosity of his first outburst and found herself enjoying a healthy, youthful interest in the great outdoors.

For the first time in years she had been able to talk to a young man without the usual reserve or suspicion; she was accepted more as an equal, as a companion, and behind every word and glance there was not the thought, "Here's a girl with money."

She divined something of this during the next week at Calgary and found herself wishing to see again this young man whose eyes were unclouded and unwavering, who never presumed or suggested, who never made her feel that she was a woman with a fortune. Her desire to see him again made her return to Banff on Thursday instead of Friday.

Paul Norcott was in the lobby when she arrived and his face lighted as he strode across to her. To Peggy's immeasurable surprise and confusion her heart began thumping and she masked this strange, bewildering sensation with a cool greeting.

But she soon regained her poise and for three days they danced and talked and took long walks. Always Paul was eager and boyish, though there were times when she caught that caged expression and sensed the rebellion in him.

Peggy was perplexed by his restraint but she was still more mystified when she began to sense unmistakable signs of strength and will, and then it occurred to her that, whatever bound him, he had never been sufficiently aroused to free himself.

She tried several times to learn his secret but that first outburst seemed to have taught him a lesson. He evaded her questions or moodily ignored them and, to her surprise, she found that she could not press the matter.

Sunday night after dinner Paul told her he was leaving early in the morning for the Coast.

"I expected to be here another week," he explained, "but uncle suddenly decided to move on."

Peggy made no comment just then. For the first time she realized that she did not want Paul Norcott to pass out of her life.

They talked together for a long time that evening but the former light-hearted camaraderie had vanished. The creases above Paul's nose and the caged expression had returned.

It was because she wished to escape the sight of it that Peggy suggested a walk on the veranda. They paced back and forth in silence for a time and then, in a dark corner, stopped to look at the mountains suddenly bathed in the light of the rising moon.

The scene itself was gorgeous beyond description but it was not the sole thing that impressed the two young people as they drank it in. The night was cold, with a clear, stinging crispness that finds a ready response in the blood of normal youth. The great mountains, rearing their heads into the sky, beckoned to the vast, illimitable spaces, inspired with their own majestic effort to reach the free void above.

A suggestion of this came to Peggy. Her blood tingled with something other than the cold. The present seemed very perfect and the morrow . . .

The shock of what tomorrow might be aroused her untamable determination. With a sudden movement her hand reached for Paul's and clasped it. For an instant his fingers remained limp and then they closed upon hers with a crushing grip.

"Peggy!" he whispered hoarsely.

He swayed toward her and then drew back.

"I told you I was caged!" he exclaimed. "I—I wish you'd forget about me! I—I'm going to say good-by now."

He turned and walked quickly away.

FOR two weeks after Paul Norcott's departure Peggy devoted long hours each day to her many business affairs, for Peggy was a woman and she had been hurt. But at the end of two weeks she suddenly departed for California. She had learned Paul's approximate itinerary from the hotel clerk at Banff and at San Francisco she discovered that he and his uncle had gone down to Del Monte a week before. That night she met him in the lobby after dinner.

Paul was astounded and then he rushed forward in delight. But he had not ceased shaking her outstretched hand before he glanced at her suspiciously.

"How did you happen to come here?" he demanded.

"I wanted to finish that interview you broke off so rudely," she answered.

Paul blushed, stammered and then looked more unapproachable than ever.

"Perhaps we had better take a walk," Peggy suggested.

In silence they went out, across the drive and down past the Roman plunge. Neither spoke until they had found a seat on a bench screened by the thick foliage along the shore of a small lake.

"Now, Paul, what's the matter?" Peggy began at once.

"I told you I was caged."

"And I said you could bend the bars."

"But I'm chained, too, bound hand and foot."

Peggy glanced at him and, as when she had first seen him, she caught that suggestion of a power and purpose that had never been aroused.

"I think we'd better get down to cases," she said.

"Look here, Peggy!" he exclaimed. "I was going back to Calgary in a year and I was going to tell you then."

His distress was acute but Peggy was ruthless.

"Tell me what?" she demanded.

He stared at her for a moment and then suddenly burst forth: "To tell you I love you! I did from the first! But I never intended to let you know. I shouldn't now. I haven't the right."

"You mean you're married—that there's some one else?"

She asked the question evenly enough but her heart had stopped beating.

"Good Lord, no! I've never even asked a girl to marry me."

"Then I don't see—" Peggy began eagerly.

"Look here!" he interrupted. "I heard all about you at Banff, about all the money you have and how you run your business better than your father did. You're a success. You've done something in the world. Do you think for a moment I could ask you to marry me when I haven't anything?"

"If you love me, and I love you, what difference does all the rest make?"

"It's not fair, such a lopsided bargain."

Peggy did not reply for a moment. She had used that same phrase not so long ago and she had believed it then.

"Not fair to me?" she asked.

"To you, or to me," he replied decisively. "Peggy, I shall be in Calgary a year from now to ask you to marry me. Until then—"

"That's nonsense!" she retorted as resolutely. "I don't care if you haven't anything. It's the man, not what he has, that I care about. As for doing something, I've got a man-sized job for you."

"You mean you want me to be my wife's business manager?"

"I thought that was it!" Peggy exclaimed angrily. "It's your pride that stands in the way, and nothing else."

Paul reached out and took both her hands. He made no attempt to draw her nearer but leaned forward and looked into her eyes.

"Peggy," he began slowly, "I haven't anything to be especially proud of and it is not my pride. If I had enough to support myself I'd marry you the moment you said the word. I'm not so finicky as to think I should have as much as you or enough to support you. All you have is yours and you are entitled to the use and enjoyment of it. It would be pure selfishness for me to refuse to let you spend it."

"Then let me spend it now as I wish."

"You don't get the point. I've been a dependent all my life. I am now. I was sick of it before I saw you—was planning to break loose. And from my own experience I know we could never go on to happiness unless I have something that will give me self-respect."

"Your pride!" she interrupted scornfully.

"It is not," Paul answered firmly. "Peggy, you don't know what a test you have put me to. It would be so easy, and so disastrous. I know because I have been through it and it's because I want the best for you, the greatest happiness, that I won't give in."

ALL the power and purpose she had sensed in him had been aroused at last, and now, eagerly as she had longed for its awakening, she feared it, foreseeing her own defeat.

"It's nonsense!" she exclaimed. "There is enough for both of us to do up there in Canada, to keep us so busy that we'll never have time to be unhappy."

"I don't even know I could do it," Paul answered. "Listen! My father died when I was a kid. My mother and I were supported by her brother. When she died a few years ago she made me promise I'd never forget my obligations to him.

"I left college to enter the war and when I came back my uncle was in ill health. He asked me to go to Florida with him. I went and ever since I have been his companion. He would never listen to my leaving. He became petulant. He pointed out that I hadn't a relative in the world except him. He even recalled the fact that he had supported me since infancy.

"It was useless to talk to him—to tell him what I wanted to do. I think his mind has been failing, and always I remembered what I had promised my mother. In a way I am fond of him. He was a prince once but he's broken now. I'm the only kin he has in the world and he really has needed me.

"That's why I'm caged, chained. I'm bound to him, dependent upon him. And after seeing what such dependence is, and can do to a man, I know it would only bring unhappiness in the end if I married you."

"And you won't take the one chance that it will come out all right," Peggy taunted.

"You mean that I won't change from one meal ticket to another," he answered. "But next fall I'm going to ask you to marry me. There are no 'if's' about it. I'm going to make good, become independent. In two weeks I start for Canada."

"For Canada!" she repeated in bewilderment.

"When I came through Edmonton I met an old friend, Wayne Borden. He was an instructor in our air school in England. I hadn't seen him since the armistice. He is ready to start north from Edmonton as soon as ice forms and he asked me to go with him. I told him I'd let him know later. As soon as I left Banff I accepted."

"But where are you going?"

"To Fort Norman."

"The oil rush!"

"Yes. Wayne is sure there is a big chance there."

"But do you know what that means?

It's fifteen hundred miles, with dogs and snowshoes, and you'll probably starve when you get there."

"I know all that. I looked into it pretty thoroughly in Edmonton. But Wayne's father owns stock in a fur-trading company and we're sure of enough to eat and of help along the way."

"But what do you know about Borden? I never saw him but I know his father and I don't trust him."

"Wayne's a prince!" Paul declared. "He's a wonder in the air and it broke his heart because he couldn't get to the front. They kept him in England because he was such a corking teacher."

PEGGY remained at Del Monte two days. She argued, threatened, pleaded and at last bowed to a determination as great as her own.

Two weeks later she saw Paul in Calgary. He was jubilant. The last boat from the north had reported a fifteen-hundred-barrel gusher.

"And uncle is willing," he told her. "He's a lot better and the prospect of all-winter golf has made a new man of him. I have nothing else to do now except win you."

"You have done that," Peggy said.

"Then to win the right to win you," he laughed.

She did not say good-by to him in Calgary but told him that business necessitated a trip to Edmonton. In reality she wished to see Wayne Borden, to satisfy herself as to the man with whom Paul was to make the hazardous journey.

Borden was older than Paul, perhaps thirty-three, quiet and soft-voiced; only his eyes, dark and brilliant, seemed alive.

"I don't like him, Paul," Peggy said when they were alone. "I can't say why. Perhaps it is what I know about his father. But I don't. Why do you go with him?"

"Because Wayne's a prince and it's the chance of a lifetime," Paul declared. "He is a Canadian and has the right to file and I'm putting up the money, a little legacy my mother left, the only thing that is my own. It will be a fifty-fifty proposition. Nothing could be fairer than that. Forget about his father and think of him as I know him."

"I'll try, only it is so easy to conjure up dangers for the ones you care about."

It was this softer, gentler Peggy, although she did not know it, who put Paul's resolution to its sorest test, and he found their final parting harder than he had expected.

"Good-by," she said as she put forth her hand and tried to keep her voice even. "Promise to remember how much I need you and to bring yourself safely back to me."

As she looked at him she realized what she had said.

"No, no!" she cried. "Not that. I wouldn't have you weakened by my love. That was cowardly of me."

The next instant she was crushed in his arms.

"Not cowardly, Peggy! Never!" he murmured as he kissed her. "It will give me strength to carry me back to you."

Peggy returned to Calgary and plunged into her work. There were no more week-ends at Banff. She could not bear the thought of the hotel without Paul and strove only to crowd the time with work until late January, when the first and only mail of the winter would come down from the Arctic Circle.

Paul had left letters at Forts Chippewyan, Smith, Resolution and Providence, the last in itself indicating excellent progress, for it meant that he and Borden had made more than half the journey before meeting the southbound winter packet.

Peggy prepared as best she could for the long wait. Many rumors and some facts came out of the north that winter but though she gathered all she could and even made one trip to Edmonton to see a man who had arrived from Fort Norman—she heard no word of Paul.

EARLY in May she was resigned to wait until the first up-river boat in the late summer for a letter. Unexpectedly one day Wayne Borden entered her office in Calgary.

She sprang forward eagerly, only to be halted by the expression in his face.

"Where is he?" she faltered.

"I don't know," Borden answered. "The last time I saw him he had started from our claim with the dog team. Two days later I followed and found a large hole in some rotten ice, and no one on the trail beyond that hole had seen him."

Only a tremendous effort of the will kept Peggy from fainting. The room whirled about her for a moment before she could find words.

"You looked for him?"

"It was useless."

"But surely you didn't accept that hole as the only evidence. You didn't abandon him."

"If there was any abandoning done it was not done by me," Borden answered evenly.

"What do you mean?"

"Miss Thorpe, you make it very difficult. I realize how hard this is for you. I have not tried to soften it because I know you would want it straight. But you must be just. I would have taken any measures possible, but our claim was beyond the others and there was nothing I could do. I was ill and I made my way out to the river without food or equipment. No one had seen Paul Norcott."

"Do you mean that he had the food and equipment?"

"Yes."

The word was all-revealing and Borden looked away. After a moment he turned back to her.

"Is there anything you would like to ask?"

"Not now." Peggy's voice was muffled. "Later, perhaps, I may want to talk to you."

"I am sorry," he said as he extended his hand. "This has been hard news to bring. I know Paul loved you. His desire for achievement, for some token of ability, became almost an obsession with him. The north and one idea sometimes does that to men."

Peggy allowed her hand to rest in his for a moment and then turned away without speaking. Borden left the office, and the moment the door was closed Peggy sprang to action. She called up her house, ordered her maid to pack a bag, had her car sent down and caught the first train for Edmonton. In the course of the next two days she learned many things.

She visited in turn the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Hudson's Bay Company. Neither could give her any information. The police had Paul's name listed as one of the "rushers" who had gone in but that was all.

Other men than Wayne Borden had come out of the north that spring, however. Some had seen Borden, others had arrived before or after, and all had brought a rumor of a young American who had tried to cheat his partner out of an oil claim below Fort Norman.

Details were vague but at last Peggy found one man who claimed to have the story at first hand. He did not know Paul's name but the description tallied. Peggy hid her real interest behind a story of business association and allowed the man to talk on, unchecked by any sound of protest.

"It was a dirty trick, all right," the "rusher" concluded. "They had the claim together but the American wanted it all and left his partner sick in the cabin. I guess he thought his partner was done for, but sick as he was he crawled after him until he found the hole in the ice and no tracks leading away from it. It ain't the first time the old north has evened up a fellow's score."

Peggy called up the office of Wayne Borden's father and learned that Wayne had returned to Edmonton. They had dinner together that night and Peggy faced him courageously across the table.

"I've heard it all," she began. "All the returned 'rushers' are talking about it."

"I am sorry," Borden told her. "I had hoped you would not hear."

"But you told me."

"I had to. When only one man comes out of the north he must explain himself, though I would have liked to save you."

"Isn't it better that I know?"

Borden looked at her for a moment. "Yes," he said at last, "because you have courage."

Peggy smiled. "Perhaps it's not courage," she said. "You see, I had known Paul only a short time. Tell me about it."

"I will. It may help you to understand. You know why he went, how determined he was to get something for himself, to stand on his own feet. That thought became an obsession.

"WE FOUND and staked a claim. Because I was a Canadian it was staked in my name. Paul had met an old friend at Fort Norman, a professor in geology who was working for the Victorian Oil Company. He gave us inside information. We acted on it and believed we had a valuable claim. We had a contract in which we agreed to share fifty-fifty or, in the event of the death of either, that all the claim should go to the living partner.

"I was ill, helpless with rheumatism. The doctors had warned me that the next attack might get to my heart and end things. Paul knew it and one day when I was at the worst he left me. I followed when I was able. If I had caught him I think I would have killed him.

"And then I found the hole in the ice only a mile away. Now I understand, as I hope you will."

"Understand what?" Peggy's eyes were searching those of her companion.

"That it wasn't Paul who did it, not the Paul you or I knew, but the Paul the north and his obsession made of him."

"And you think there is not a chance that Paul is living, that he had intended to do, not what you think, but something else?"

"I wish I could but I know that hope is empty. In the spring my story will be confirmed."

"What do you expect to do now?" Peggy abruptly changed the subject.

"Go on as I had planned. The claim is valuable. If I can sell it I intend to stake others. There's a fortune to be made up there."

"It must be a wonderful country," Peggy said as she looked away. "A year ago we had hardly heard of it and now it is making men and marring them, testing souls, carrying some to victory and throwing others, warped and twisted, into the scrap heap."

She said it with a smile but her hands were clenched under the table and her mind was busy with the plan which had brought her to Edmonton. For Peggy had determined to go to Fort Norman. That afternoon she had made application for passage north on the boats of the two fur companies but had been told that all accommodations were booked six months before.

Undaunted, she began the next morning to arrange for the long journey by canoe; but the Royal Canadian Mounted heard of it.

"As far as Fort Smith, all right," she was informed. "Beyond that you can't go. Every day we are turning back men who are unfit. It is no place for a woman."

"But I must go!" she declared. "And I will!"

"Don't try it. There are policemen all the way down-river and they'll send you back under guard when they find you without a pass."

She tried other plans, but the best advice she could get was to the effect that a year could easily pass before her arrival at Fort Norman.

She tried to buy a pass from some one who had obtained one of the coveted permits from the Mounted, intending to disguise herself and go as a man, but none of the fortunate ones would sell and the description on the pass itself was too great an obstacle.

For a time she considered sending some one to do what she wished to do but she had seen men's unquestioned acceptance of Wayne Borden's story and she knew that only indomitable belief in Paul Norcott's decency and courage could accomplish her purpose.

In spite of all she had heard, her faith was unshaken.

Yet the weeks slipped by and she found herself no nearer departure than when she had first gone to Edmonton. From out of the far, frozen north had come the long call of her mate and she was unable to answer. For the second time in her life Peggy Thorpe failed to get what she wanted.

As PEGGY and Wayne Borden came out of the hotel lobby one afternoon their conversation was interrupted by the sound of a motor. Borden, his ears trained by experience in France, placed a restraining hand on Peggy's arm and pointed at an airplane passing overhead.

"Nervy pilot, that," Borden said after a glance. "He's taking chances with such a motor. It shouldn't be allowed, flying over a city with a worn-out bus."

"Why do the police allow it?"

"A bobby would have a fine chance at stopping him," Wayne laughed.

"But the police could keep him on the ground if he landed," Peggy said.

"Yes, but I don't know how to stop them once they are off. So long as the gas holds out and the motor doesn't miss, a man in a plane has the world by the tail."

Peggy looked at the airplane speculatively.

"I suppose that is true," she said. "I have never thought of it before."

After leaving Borden she walked down the street and stopped beside a taxi:

"Did you see the airplane?" she asked the driver. "I want you to follow it. Take me to the place where it will land."

Two miles distant the airplane hovered over a level field, made a final swoop, and taxied along the soft turf. Its pilot scrambled over the side, and stood, goggles in hand, studying the land about him. To Jimmie Barnes, veteran of a score of half-forgotten escapades in France, the ride to Edmonton offered little of the thrill of former days. Then too, his present occupation of carrying passengers from city to city, or scattering handbills, had in its performance little promise of the adventure which his twentieth-century nature craved.

As he tied down his plane for the night his mind ran over the incidents of his life since his return from overseas. Devoted to flying as only a man can be who has felt the thrill of a humming motor, and the whining song of the wind in the taut wires, he had found work in California with a small commercial company, contented if he might follow in a humble way the profession which he had learned so well in France.

It had been while working as pilot of one of the shabby planes that an incident had occurred which won for him a plane of his own and the opportunity to strike out as an independent flier. Charles Finley, an imposing figure in the industrial life of San Francisco, had hired Jimmie to carry him to Reno. The flight had been filled with something of the thrill of former days, for a sudden storm as they flew over the mountains, a faulty motor, and a threatened plunge into Lake Tahoe had made his nerves tingle with the old spirit of adventure and filled his passenger with a lively respect for his pilot's intrepidity. The flight had been made in record time, and Finley, appreciative of the aviator's skill, had bought and presented him with the plane, offering with it a piece of advice:

"When you hear of oil in a new field, get there at the first smell. That's what I did. It's what I do yet. It's why I came here today. And if you need help when you get there let me know."

With these words the financier had left, Jimmie still standing dumfounded by the other's generosity.

Since then he had acted as an independent flier, and it was in this capacity that he had come to Edmonton.

As Jimmie finished tying down his plane Peggy Thorpe drove on to the field. In a glance she took in the honest, dare-devil features of the man before her, and from her past experience and knowledge of men, knew that here was one who would go unquestioningly wherever she might direct.

"I want you to take me to Fort Norman," she began at once.

It was the snap of her words, carrying with them the implication of a forceful nature, that immediately won Jimmie over. Never before had that tone of voice, with its connotation of authority, failed to inspire him. Few men had it, and never before had he met it in a woman, but always it was an intoxicant with him, especially just now when he was becoming lonesome and felt the need of a guiding mind.

"Sure," he grinned. "Where is it?"

"About fifteen hundred miles north of here."

Jimmie glanced ruefully at his worn-out bus. "I'm sorry," he said, "but this old wreck couldn't make more than a hundred and fifty."

"Is it the only plane you own?"

Jimmie nodded.

"Do you know where I could buy one?"

"Not here."

"If I get one will you fly it to Fort Norman?"

Jimmie looked at her with frank admiration. "I'd be glad to," he said.

Before dinner they had seen the one airplane in Edmonton and Jimmie immediately declared it unfit for the work. As a result they were in Calgary the next morning and before noon had purchased a new six-cylinder English biplane which, Jimmie said, could fly right on through to the North Pole.

IT WAS now mid-June, more than a month after Borden's return from the north. In that month Peggy had tried repeatedly to get permission from the Mounted to go to Fort Norman and she knew her defiance and persistence had aroused their suspicions. If she were seen in Edmonton with an airplane the police might take steps to stop her, and she knew that the attempt of any one to outfit an airplane there would result disastrously.

Together they examined a map of the

proposed trip. Jimmie's experience in flying to Reno had taught him a lesson and since then he had become a confirmed student of charts.

"Wow!" he exclaimed when he found Fort Norman. "That's a long way from a railroad."

"Twelve hundred miles," Peggy told him.

"And what's all this country in here like?" he asked as he swept a hand across the map.

"Practically all forest and lakes and rivers."

"Aren't there any ranches or towns?"

"There are cleared spaces around some of the trading-posts but that is all."

"Then how are we going to land if we have engine trouble or when we get there?"

Peggy's ignorance of flying was complete and her whole attention had been centered on leaving.

"Do you mean you always have to have a level field on which to land?" she asked in dismay.

"Of course, unless you want a bad crash."

Jimmie had not noticed her consternation, so intent was he on the map.

"Look here," he said. "There's no place to stop except all these forts. What are they? Regular-army posts?"

"They are fur-trading posts, all of them."

"And the map's blank except along these big rivers and lakes," he continued.

"That means the country has never been surveyed. None of it has been accurately mapped."

"Then the only sure way for us to get there is to follow this big river that goes from Athabasca Landing right on past Fort Norman," he declared.

Jimmie turned and faced her as they sat at the desk in her office.

"That's going to be easy!" he cried. "We'll put a couple of pontoons on the bus and land and take off from the water. It's the only thing to do. Then we could stop anywhere along the way."

"Can you do it with our plane?" Peggy demanded excitedly.

"Sure. I helped a fellow to attach some once on San Francisco Bay."

Peggy picked up her desk phone, called long distance and asked for a number in Winnipeg.

"If there is a set of pontoons in Canada this friend of mine will know it," she said.

A few minutes later her call was put through, but, though she succeeded in getting what she wanted, there was a troubled look in her eyes when she hung up the receiver.

"He told me this is the second call for pontoons he has had this week," she said.

"Is that why you had them sent to Battleford instead of here?" Jimmie asked.

"Yes. I know you could put them on there and your presence over there would not be suspected. It's on the Saskatchewan, 250 miles northeast of us. I wonder who else wants pontoons and what for?"

THEY remained in conference until late that night. There was the matter of food, of charts, of extra gas tanks, of spare parts for motor and plane. As they talked Peggy saw that while Jimmie might be a natural airman and knew in a general way what was wanted, he did not have a good grounding in the fundamentals of aviation and he was reckless of details.

She went over everything minutely, pinned him down to exact statements and facts and kept a pencil busy making notes. In the end she was satisfied with the outline.

"It's going to work fine!" Jimmie exclaimed. "You go on to Athabasca Landing and as soon as I can, I'll go up the Saskatchewan, hop over and pick you up, and then we'll head north, take on the gas and be gone without the police ever knowing we intended to start."

"It ought to work," Peggy agreed, feeling more cheerful than she had for weeks. "I don't see how they can suspect us. But do be careful, Jimmie. Don't talk to any one about what we intend to do. Say you're planning to carry passengers between Edmonton and Winnipeg, but never mention Fort Norman."

Peggy took the train to Edmonton and Jimmie flew to Battleford. The pontoons arrived that night and, with the aid of two mechanics, Jimmie began installing them. Lacking scientific data and a fundamental grasp of the undertaking he depended on his natural sense of balance to get them in the right position.

He succeeded better than he had hoped and the third afternoon a trial satisfied him that the plane was right. As he tied up and came ashore a stranger stopped him.

"How does she work?" the man asked.

SOMETHING in his attitude and a glimpse of a small shield pinned to the stranger's vest beneath his coat aroused Jimmie's suspicion.

"Rotten," he answered. "I've got those boats too far back."

"You mean you'll have to change them?"

"Sure. If I didn't I'd go straight to the bottom sometime if the water was a little rough or I didn't hit it just right."

"That'll be quite a job."

"Three days anyhow."

Jimmie walked past and up the bank. When he saw that he was followed he took a passing car to the center of the town and there, after losing himself in a crowd, hired an automobile and was driven back to the airplane. Five minutes later he was in the air and heading up the Saskatchewan.

"They'll have a sweet time following me," he muttered as he climbed swiftly. "Wonder who tipped them off?"

Ten miles up the river he turned north, circled around Battleford, kept on down-river and, at the big bend, hopped across to Saskatoon on the South Saskatchewan River. Dropping to the water, he taxied to a mooring and half an hour later had filled his gas tanks.

"They'll never look for me here, more than a hundred miles south of Battleford," he thought, though he watched the bank closely for signs of a uniform.

But his ruse had worked. He was in the air again without being questioned and he flew quickly across to the Saskatchewan, again circled Battleford and at sunset dropped to the river in a secluded spot below Fort Pitt and moored his airplane between two small islands. As he satisfied himself that everything was in shape for the night a messenger boy was delivering a telegram at his hotel in Battleford. It read:

> Don't start until you hear from me. Important.
> MARGARET THORPE.

At Edmonton Peggy had chosen a small and little known hotel and kept off the streets as much as possible. The third morning, after her arrangements were completed, she was waiting in her room for the afternoon train north when she heard an airplane overhead. She ran to a window.

The machine sailed past, low and in full view, and its glistening, varnished wings and the two long, log-like affairs hanging in place of the familiar wheels convinced her that it was her plane.

Worried for fear something had happened, or that Jimmie had misunderstood orders and had flown to Edmonton instead of Athabasca Landing, she went downstairs, called a taxi and asked to be taken to the river-bank.

The chauffeur suggested the big bridge as the most likely landing-place for the plane and when they arrived they saw it already tied to a buoy and the pilot being rowed ashore. Never doubting but that it was Jimmie, Peggy ran down just as the behooded and begoggled airman stepped ashore. Despite his costume she recognized Wayne Borden.

AT THE same moment Borden saw her. He jerked off his goggles and stared, first in surprise, then with suspicion. Peggy, who had been confident it was Jimmie, realized that she was rushing to meet the one man she did not wish to see. But her coolness permitted her to hide her perturbation.

"What luck!" she cried. "I saw your plane come down and thought I might have a ride."

"Do you really want to fly?" he asked.

"I have ever since we saw that plane scattering handbills over the city. I've never been up. Can't we go now?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Thorpe, but that was only a trial spin and I must shift the pontoons slightly before I take the air again."

"When they're fixed?" she asked quickly.

"Not until I've tested the machine. It's too great a risk. Later I'll be glad to take you for a flight. The pontoons are something of an experiment."

"Did you have them put on?"

"Yes, it was the only way I could get such a craft out here and I needed one in a hurry."

"Oh, I thought you got it to play in."

For the first time Borden smiled.

"Hardly," he said. "I am going to run messages down the Churchill River this summer. My father has acquired some mining interests half-way to Hudson Bay and it is important that we keep in close touch with the property this summer."

"But what about your oil claim at Fort Norman? The first boat goes soon, doesn't it?"

"That can wait. But I didn't know you were in Edmonton."

"No one ever knows where I'll be," she laughed. "I never know myself. I had to run up on a little business matter. Let me take you downtown. I have a taxi waiting."

Peggy dropped Borden at his home and then hurried to the telegraph office. After sending a wire to Jimmie not to leave Battleford she went immediately to her hotel, packed, left orders for the forwarding of telegrams and caught the train to Athabasca Landing.

While she was eating breakfast the next morning she heard the roar of a motor and was told by the excited waitress that an airplane had landed in the river.

It was as Peggy suspected. Wayne Borden had deceived her when he talked about his trial spin.

She went at once to her room to keep out of sight until Borden had departed on his long journey north. Hiding behind a curtain, she watched him walk up from the river. He carried himself with cool assurance and Peggy, looking down at him, visioned how easily he had obtained credence in the north for his story, blackening and dishonoring his partner's name even while he simulated an unwillingness to tell the worst. Now she knew as surely as though he had told her that his quick flight north was to complete the robbery of Paul Norcott.

If it had been hard not to denounce him when he had brought the story of Paul's death it was doubly hard to maintain silence now as he prepared to leave. But Peggy had learned to play a careful game and she knew that the first word of her suspicion would only result in her own failure in a country where he had his father's political influence to protect him.

ONE course lay open for her and she became more determined than ever on its accomplishment. She must go north, learn if Paul were living or dead, go on until she had cleared his name and delivered his murderer to the justice he had so nearly cheated.

As Borden disappeared through the doorway of the hotel Peggy again heard the sound of a motor and looked out to see a second plane dropping to the river. As she watched it she saw Borden run out of the hotel and stare at the settling plane. Then he started quickly toward the stream.

Suddenly the airplane shot upward, banked and whirled away over the town. It continued to climb swiftly and to Peggy's astonishment and relief disappeared rapidly in the south. She rushed to a side window of her corner room to watch it and hung far out over the sill.

As the plane became a speck in the sky Peggy suddenly became conscious of some one else watching it, of some one watching her. She glanced down. Wayne Borden was standing at the side of the building looking up at her, and before she could withdraw her head he had raised his hat in greeting.

PEGGY knew instantly that she had made a mistake. When she jerked her head back from the window and refused to acknowledge Borden's greeting she indicated that she wished to avoid him.

Two ways were open to her. She could remain in her room until she heard from Jimmie and trust that they could get away together, or she could take another chance on deceiving Borden.

She decided instantly and rushed downstairs. Borden was just entering the lobby.

"We do meet in the queerest places!" Peggy exclaimed. "But I thought you were going down the Churchill."

"This is only another practice spin," he told her. "I shifted the pontoons slightly yesterday afternoon and tried them out this morning. We flew up from Edmonton in less than an hour this morning. That's a contrast with the old days before the railroad, when Athabasca Landing was the gateway to the north. Then I spent two or three days on the journey. But what has brought you up here?"

"Oh, dad made a small investment years ago that has caused me endless trouble. I decided to come up and close it out one way or another."

She paused for a moment.

"But now that you have tested your airplane and found it all right, I can have my promised ride. Why can't you take me back to Edmonton with you?"

"I would be more than glad to," Borden answered, "only I have a passenger, one of the Mounted Police."

"It seems to me that is against the very spirit of flying," Peggy said. "I thought one of the chief joys was immunity from the police, and here you bring one of them with you."

"It takes a plane to catch a plane," Borden laughed. "The police are after that fellow who flew over a few minutes ago. Chap named Barnes who, they have been told, plans to fly north without a permit."

He was looking straight into Peggy's eyes as he spoke but Peggy had learned to permit men to do that when they sprung some surprise in a business conference, and Borden's paraphrase had warned her.

"But they didn't catch him," she said.

"Oh, they will," Borden answered confidently. "He's got to load up with gas before he starts and every place is watched."

As Borden spoke a red-coated policeman entered the lobby and beckoned to him.

"Good-by," Peggy said as he started away. "I'm so sorry I can't have a ride to Edmonton."

As she climbed the stairs she looked back and saw the policeman watching her closely. Borden's back was turned but he was speaking emphatically and the policeman slowly nodded his head without taking his eyes from the girl on the stairs.

Peggy hurried to her room and from the window she saw the policeman leave the hotel and start toward the railroad station. She knew he was going to forbid the delivery of the express consigned to Jimmie Barnes and that it would be impossible for either her or Jimmie to get hold of the supplies purchased for the journey.

She did not believe for a moment that Borden was acting only as a disinterested pilot. His activity in the matter confirmed her belief that he had learned of her own plans to go north and was doing everything in his power to stop her. She had covered her trail well, using fictitious names and paying cash, but she had relied on Jimmie Barnes's caution. There, Peggy decided, she had made her mistake. She had picked up this stranger, a waif from the States, a youngster little different from a hobo in his worn-out airplane.

PEGGY'S thoughts were interrupted by the return of the policeman. He went into the hotel and a little later Wayne Borden emerged. He walked at once to the river and after a few minutes Peggy saw him rising in his airplane. He circled over the town and then started straight south toward Edmonton.

While the policeman remained downstairs Peggy did not dare leave her room. Although Borden had pointed her out to him, she doubted if he had direct evidence and she decided not to supply it.

For an hour Peggy strove for some solution. Suddenly she heard a gentle tap on her door. Her first thought was that the policeman was endeavoring to learn if she were in her room and, if not, to search it for evidence of her intended flight.

She knew the crucial moment had come. Borden, she was now convinced, was intent on reaching the north and completing his scheme of robbing Paul of his rights before she could get there.

As Peggy hesitated midway across the room she saw the door knob move and remembered that she had neglected to turn the key. The next instant the door opened suddenly and Jimmie Barnes darted in and closed it behind him. He held a finger to his lips.

"Jimmie!" Peggy whispered excitedly. "You're a regular Chinook. I was all snowed under. But where is the airplane?"

"A couple of miles down-river, in a slough," he answered. "That other fellow flew off looking for me, didn't he?"

"I think he did, but a policeman is still here waiting for you."

She explained hurriedly about Borden and what he had done in the last few days, though she did not mention Paul Norcott or what had happened up beneath the Arctic Circle.

"So he's trying to beat you up there?" he asked.

"Yes, and he'll do anything to prevent my going. If he starts before we do he'll leave word all down the river for the police to hold us. But what happened to you?"

Jimmie explained how he had been questioned in Battleford and how he had escaped.

"This morning I came on up the Saskatchewan to Victoria," he concluded, "and then hopped over to this river. I was just going to land when I saw the other plane. That wouldn't have bothered me any but there was a fellow in a red coat in a boat right near it."

"So you just kept right on going."

"Sure. It was the only thing to do. I knew you'd be waiting here in the hotel and, sure enough, after I landed and came up from the river I found that policeman sitting downstairs. I couldn't backout then and I walked right up to the desk and asked for a room. I saw your name and room number on the register and as soon as the hall was clear I came up."

"But I can't leave the hotel while he's down there watching," Peggy said. "It would give him the chance to stop me."

"No, you can't leave until after dark," Jimmie replied. "Now here's the way I dope it. You lie low all day. You might even send for a doctor and some medicine and tell the hotel people you're sick.

"I'll scout around and buy all the things we need, grub and camp stuff, and hire some one to take it down the river after dark. You can sneak out the back way and go along. Then in the morning, at first light, we'll be off."

Peggy considered the plan before replying.

"It ought to work," she said at last. "There's a man running a little outfitting store here who was in a bad hole once and dad helped him out. He'll do anything for us. I'll give you a note to him."

"That's it," Jimmie agreed. "I was afraid of getting some one we can't trust. I'll see him and then hike back down the river and be ready to get out if any one should find the plane."

Peggy had her original lists and she gave these to Jimmie with a note. After he had gone she rang for a maid, ordered medicine sent to the room and exhibited all the evidences of a violent sick headache.

THE maid was sympathetic and voluble. She explained that Athabasca Landing was having the most exciting time since the old days when it had been the gateway to the north.

"Why, I can remember when we never had anything but dog teams and the transport to Edmonton by horses," she said. "The old Northwest Mounted men used to leave here for trips of thousands of miles by canoe and dog team. That was like yesterday, and today we have one airplane chasing another and a mounted policeman trying to catch one of the things."

"That is exciting," Peggy agreed. "Did the policeman catch the airman?"

"No, but he says he will. He's telegraphed to Edmonton and Battleford and all the towns along the Saskatchewan and down the Athabasca to the end of steel. He says that fellow can't land without getting caught."

The long twilight came and the suspense increased for the girl in the lonely hotel room. She derived what consolation she could from the fact that Borden's airplane had not returned. She imagined him searching the Saskatchewan for Jimmie, a red-coated policeman riding with him.

Just as the late darkness came she got up and dressed in the clothing she had purchased for the journey. She listened at the door until she was satisfied there was no one in the hall and then slipped out and hurried to the back stairs.

Peggy, knowing that it was now or never, hurried through the kitchen and out of the door, down a dark back way to the rear of the little store to which she had sent Jimmie. A shadow loomed up against the old log structure and a hoarse whisper came:

"All right, Miss Thorpe. Everything's ready."

She followed him to the river and five minutes after leaving the hotel she was floating downstream.

"We'll just let the current take us for a bit," the man said. "We might be followed, you know. Those redcoats are sly devils."

Nothing happened, and in less than half an hour Peggy heard a low whistle on the shore near which they were drifting. She answered and Jimmie directed them downstream to the mouth of the slough. A few minutes later the rowboat was alongside the airplane. The supplies were stowed in the fuselage and Peggy was helped to her seat.

Having rested all day Peggy was wide awake with excitement. She insisted that Jimmie get as much sleep as he could, promising to waken him at the first sign of dawn.

As soon as it was light enough for him to see he cranked his motor, warmed it up slowly and then taxied out of the slough.

Once they had the broad stretch of the river before them he opened the throttle wide. The plane shot forward, the water swirling from in front of the pontoons, and then it rose quickly and surely and the first part of the long journey into the north had begun.

IT HAD been part of their plan to stop in the Clearwater River, just beyond the end of steel and at the beginning of the water route, to take on gasoline. This would give them full tanks at the last possible filling-place and insure fuel for the remaining 1,200 miles to Fort Norman and back.

The vigilance of the Mounted and the hotel maid's statement that the redcoat had wired to the end of the new railroad made this impossible, however. Yet, because Jimmie had counted on filling his tanks there and knew he did not have enough for the journey, it would be necessary to stop somewhere.

At dawn they had discussed the situation. Peggy had pointed out that his subterfuge had worked once and that it undoubtedly would work again. She suggested that they land on the Clearwater above the end of the railroad and that Jimmie go down the bank, buy gasoline and have it delivered to the plane.

Accordingly, once they had risen from the Athabasca, Jimmie began to climb rapidly. He went up to 15,000 feet as he sped on into the north and two hours later saw the junction of the Clearwater and Athabasca far ahead. He immediately turned east, closed the throttle so that the sound of the motor would not be heard and glided across the railroad and down to the Clearwater several miles above the spot where freight was landed on the bank.

It was still early morning and after working the airplane into a secure place between an island and the south bank they went ashore and cooked breakfast. When the meal was finished Jimmie started downstream on foot.

Three miles brought him in sight of the landing. Tents and board shacks, piles of freight, lumber and machinery and a number of scows in the river marked the spot. Beyond them was a stretch of level land and beyond that the forest. Toward this several teams were starting from the river, and Jimmie knew they were on the road to the head of steel, three miles away.

He circled to the woods, kept within their cover until he reached the road and then walked down it to the rough, temporary settlement on the bank of the Clearwater.

The day had just begun. Men were driving teams away, freight was being dumped on the ground or carried to the scows and motor-boats were pushing out into the current, each with a scow in front. In the confusion and bustle Jimmie was hardly noticed.

He walked about for a time, apparently idling, but always he was on the lookout for a red-coated policeman. The policeman did not materialize but at the river-bank he found many barrels and cases of gasoline. Beside them a man was tinkering with a motor in a boat and Jimmie sat down and watched him.

A few remarks, a helping hand with the refractory gas engine and the conversation that ensued soon resulted in an offer and a quick acceptance. Half an hour later the boat was chugging up-river with a big load of gasoline aboard.

As the landing dropped astern Jimmie saw a red-coated figure walking down to the river. A mile farther he believed he saw a boat leaving in pursuit. He had reasoned that any boat going upstream would be noticed, for all travel was down-river just then, and when he reached the airplane he quickly loaded the gas.

Peggy had hidden in the fuselage when she heard the boat coming, as they had planned. The boatman departed, Jimmie tugged at the propeller and when the motor caught she sat up in her seat.

Jimmie cast off the ropes and hurried into the pilot's seat. He opened the throttle, the plane moved slowly down to more open water and then, just as it rose in the air, a motor-boat came around the end of the island directly in front.

A member of the Mounted who stood in the bow signaled them to return. Peggy watched Jimmie anxiously but he only waved his hand at the policeman, zoomed upward and was away.

The plane climbed steadily to five thousand feet and then, with the vast, green forest stretching away in every direction as far as they could see and the great river slashing it like a silver ribbon, the two rushed northward at a hundred miles an hour.

After her first thrill at the thought of final departure, Peggy settled back in her seat and watched the country unfold beneath her. She felt no fear. Her triumph left no room for that emotion. She was off, and in spite of the Mounted, and Wayne Borden, had begun her long journey to find Paul.

A HALF hour later the motor began to miss. At the same time a bank of heavy clouds rose in the southeast and swung toward them. When they were directly above Great Slave Lake the storm struck.

Turning before it to seek shelter behind a point, Jimmie whirled along above the shore toward the west. The lake swung southward here and its eastern shore offered good shelter so long as the wind did not change. He dropped lower but he had not found a good landing when a squall rushed out from the land and blinded him.

Struggling against the gusts and striving to see, fearful of what the rain would do to his propeller, he dropped down close to shore, took the water and taxied forward.

Suddenly the wind ceased. The plane moved forward gently and the pontoons touched the sand. At the same moment the rain squall swept westward and off to the right a few hundred yards they saw the buildings of Fort Resolution.

"Now we're in for it!" Jimmie exclaimed disgustedly. "We don't dare leave with the motor in this shape."

He waded ashore and tying the plane to a huge mass of driftwood, examined the motor.

Their landing had been seen from the fort and a swarm of youngsters, Indian and half-breed, ran down the shore. A group of adults soon joined them, employees of the Hudson's Bay Company and the post-manager and two black-robed priests from the mission.

Jimmie continued to work at the gas line while Peggy anxiously studied the crowd that gathered at the water's edge. There was no sign of a policeman in it.

"I think we're all right," she whispered to Jimmie. "Have you found the trouble?"

"Strainer picked up some dirt and stopped the line," he answered. "I'll have it together in a second."

He worked for a few moments and then straightened up with his tools in his hands.

"Now she's clear," he said.

At the same moment a canoe slipped up alongside the right pontoon.

"Are you Miss Thorpe?" a voice sounded almost in Peggy's ear.

She looked around to see a mounted policeman standing in a canoe beside her.

"No, I'm not," she answered instantly.

"Then your pass will give your name," the policeman said. "Please let me see it."

Jimmie had taken in the situation at a glance and had slipped down to the other side of the fuselage and cut the ropes which held the airplane to the shore. As he started to turn the propeller the machine drifted out.

"Catch those ropes!" the corporal shouted. "Sandy! Marcel! Get hold of her there! Now, young fellow, leave that thing alone and walk ashore. And I'll ask you to do the same, Miss Thorpe."

Peggy hesitated. She believed they had come ahead of Borden, yet this man who could not have received written word from the south since late in the winter, knew her name.

"You are making a mistake," she began indignantly.

"No mistake," he interrupted curtly. "No one goes north without a pass. Those are regulations. Please don't make any trouble."

Jimmie stood looking at Peggy as if awaiting orders but she shook her head. There was nothing else to do. They had been caught, trapped, and she decided to submit now and try her wiles with the corporal later.

"Do as he says, Jimmie," she told him, and they went ashore.

The airplane was securely tied and, with the entire population of Fort Resolution at their heels, Peggy and Jimmie walked up to the post with the corporal between them. Jimmie was locked in a small cabin and Peggy was taken to the dwelling-house of the Hudson's Bay Company.

"You must consider yourself a prisoner, Miss Thorpe," the corporal said. "I won't lock you up because there is no chance of your getting away. But you must remain here until I can send you out."

Peggy did not comment. She was turned over to Mrs. McKinnie, wife of the postmanager, and the corporal left.

"DID an airplane arrive here yesterday or today?" Peggy asked the moment he was gone.

"This morning about ten o'clock," Mrs. McKinnie answered. "And that is the reason you were arrested. One of the men talked to Corporal Trenery a few minutes and then they went right on."

Peggy did not ask any more questions then. She knew exactly what had happened: that Wayne Borden had started ahead of them, immediately after his departure from Athabasca Landing the day before, that he had spread the news all the way down-river, and that she was balked while he went on to complete the work he had begun.

She was in despair, for she knew the Mounted, but that very despair, and her faith in Paul, drove her to action. She asked to see Corporal Trenery and when he came she discarded subterfuge entirely.

Admitting at once who she was and that she had been refused a pass to enter the north, she stated her case.

"I know men," she concluded. "All my life I've been with men. For years I've carried on my father's business. And I know Paul Norcott is incapable of the thing Borden tells about him."

"I am sorry, Miss Thorpe," Trenery answered. "What you say may be true—I hope it is. But the truth will come out in time and your going on is not a question for me to decide. My orders are not to let any one proceed north without a pass. This morning I received special orders by airplane that you are to be held and sent out by the first boat."

"Yes, and who brought them?" Peggy cried. "The man who tells this despicable tale, the man to whose advantage it is to stop an investigation, the man who may be going even now to complete a murder."

"But Paul Norcott has been reported dead," Trenery said gently.

"By whom?" Peggy demanded. "By the man who wants the case closed. But he didn't dare say he knew it to be true. That is the thing that gives me hope. He is playing safe for fear his victim may be alive to confront him. And you are letting him go on to cheat, to rob and perhaps complete a murder."

"If the case is as you think," the corporal answered, "the truth will come out. The oil fields are not what you think, a place where crime may be committed with impunity. The wild days of Alaska are gone. There are only a handful of 'rushers,' all picked men whose credentials have been investigated, and the district is patrolled. This case has been reported and is being investigated. The report is that Paul Norcott drowned."

"And that is why I want to go on, because every one believes Wayne Borden. It is only fair to Paul that the one person who still has faith in him should go to Fort Norman. If Paul is dead, I shall have to bear it. At least give me the right to clear his name."

Corporal Trenery looked away.

"I am sorry but I have my orders," he repeated doggedly. "You must go back by boat."

Peggy did not answer. She believed that her plea for justice had left him untouched. He felt sorry for her and that was all.

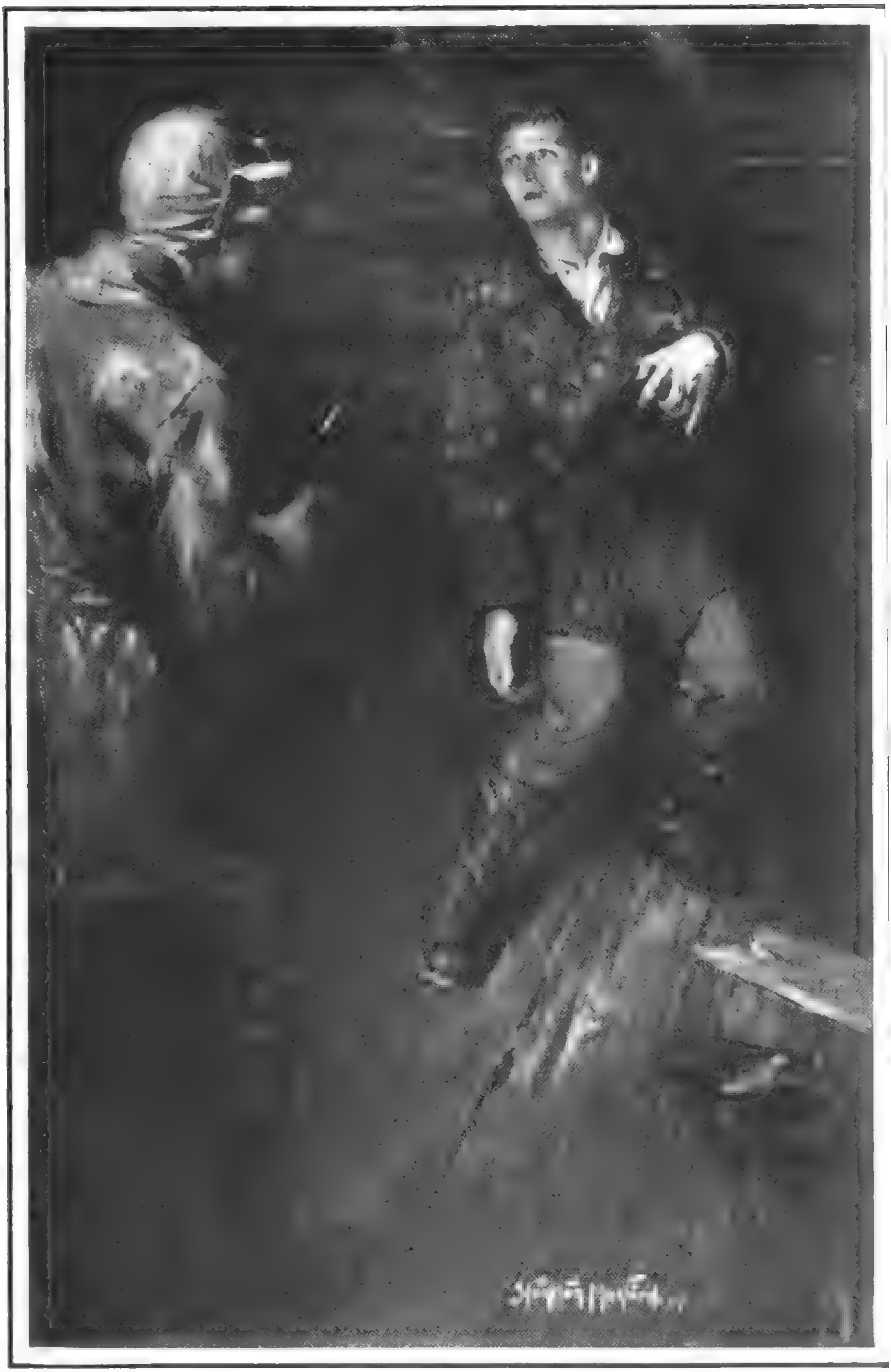
"All right," she said despondently when he rose to go. "There seems nothing else to do except go back to Edmonton."

TWO hours later when Corporal Trenery looked in on Jimmie the pilot was asleep. The long twilight had come and the people of the post had gone to bed. He closed the door of Jimmie's room and went outside for a last study of the weather and glimpse of the captive airplane before darkness came.

The dwelling-house of the Hudson's Bay Company, in which Peggy had been placed, was unlighted but he walked over for a last look at the room she occupied. Then he returned to the cabin in which he and Jimmie were to sleep, locked the door on the inside, placed the key in his pocket and went to bed.

Just as he was dropping off to sleep a peculiar noise came to his ears. It sounded like the rapid firing of shots from a rifle but almost immediately it settled into a roar broken by frequent loud explosions.

Trenery was out of bed with a bound and he ran at once to Jimmie's room. In the darkness he felt in the bed. It was empty.



There came a blinding flash, and Paul wilted without hearing the roar that seemed to burst the walls asunder.

He pulled on his clothes and ran across to the Hudson's Bay dwelling-house. As he approached a light appeared in a window and McKinnie let him in.

"That machine got away," Trenery said. "Did the girl go with it?"

The manager led him to the room Peggy had occupied. He knocked and when there was no response he opened the door. The bed had not been slept in.

"Well, if they expect me to chase those things they've got to get me one to do it in!" Trenery exclaimed in disgust. "If it had been dogs or canoe I'd 'a' known what to do."

But Peggy and Jimmie did not go far. A hundred miles of open lake lay between them and the beginning of the Mackenzie River straight west and Jimmie did not care to attempt it in the darkness. He taxied out from shore for two miles and when he found the water becoming rougher under the east wind, he turned southward and an hour after their departure landed in the shelter of a bay three miles south of the post.

"How did you do it?" Peggy demanded when he had shut off the motor and tied up to shore. "I had given up all hope when you came to my window."

"That fellow was easy," Jimmie laughed. "I told him I didn't know anything about having to have a pass or breaking any law and that it was all the same to me if I didn't go any farther. He asked what he should do with the bus and I told him I didn't care. I was through with it.

"He thought I was a quitter with that line of talk and so he didn't watch me close. I pretended I was asleep when he looked into my room. He went outside just at dark and I sneaked out and hid behind the shack. After he'd gone to bed I crawled over to where he'd put you and that was all there was to it."

"Oh, Jimmie, forgive me!" Peggy's voice mystified him because it trembled. "I believed them. Mrs. McKinnie told me that you had turned against me. You were the only one I had to depend on and I lost hope."

"You didn't think I was going to quit on you that way!" he protested.

"I shouldn't have, after all you've done. But I did, Jimmie, and I'm so sorry."

"Oh, that's all right! You didn't know me very well. Any one would have believed it. I had to make it strong. But after the corporal told me what you were going for I knew you had to get there."

In his clumsy attempt to find escape from the embarrassment of her humility he had touched upon the real cause of the expedition. His unasked loyalty broke down Peggy's natural reticences and before she knew what she was doing she had plunged into the true story of her journey to Fort Norman.

It was the first time Jimmie Barnes had ever been given a glimpse of a woman's heart and he was silent for a moment when she had finished.

"The dirty cur!" he said, his voice gruff with emotion. "We're going to get there and we'll fix him. We'll start at daylight and we won't touch again until we're at Fort Norman."

JIMMIE was true to his word. At daylight he went over the motor thoroughly, satisfied himself that everything was all right, and then, just before the early sunrise, cranked up and cast loose. Once in the air they turned northward along the lake shore and soon were over Fort Resolution. In a moment the shore had dropped behind and the last lap of the long journey had begun.

Before noon the plane had settled to the surface of the vast river at Fort Norman. Indians and half-breeds, a priest from the mission and the managers of the two rival trading companies ran down to the bank and many willing hands helped tow this strange craft of two elements to a safe harbor.

As soon as Peggy was ashore she inquired if a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Force were stationed at Fort Norman.

"He's stationed here but he's down the river at the oil fields just now," Stewart, the Hudson's Bay Company manager, told her.

"Have you seen another airplane in the last day or two?" she asked.

"I haven't seen one but from what some of the Indians told me I believe one passed high above the fort on its way north yesterday afternoon," Stewart replied.

Peggy hesitated a moment. Covertly she had been studying Stewart. He was a young man, open, almost boyish, of nature, and it was clear that he was anxious to be agreeable to this first white woman he had seen in a long time.

"Could I talk to you in private for a few minutes?" she asked suddenly.

"Of course," he answered. "Come right up to the post."

Once seated in the living-room of the dwelling-house, Peggy went straight to the point.

"Do you remember two men from the outside, Wayne Borden and Paul Norcott, who passed here on their way to the oil fields last winter?" she asked.

"I remember them both very well," Stewart told her. "They stopped for a day or two on their way up."

"I have heard various stories of what happened after they left here. Will you tell me the facts as you have heard them, as you believe them to be true?"

"Of course. It all happened fifty or sixty miles down-river and several miles back on the western side. The story came through here first as a rumor and later I saw Borden and Jack Kerr, the corporal who investigated the case. From all I have heard it was something like this:

"Borden and Norcott staked a claim back from the river, adjoining some of the Victorian Oil Company's holdings. It was believed to be an excellent prospect and they built a cabin on it.

"You have to take Borden's story since no one else was near them. He says he was sick and that Norcott, with whom he had had trouble, loaded up the sleigh with all their food and outfit and started off, leaving him alone and helpless.

"Borden says that after a couple of days he was able to get out. He followed Norcott's trail and a mile from the cabin came to a small muskeg lake. The tracks pointed unmistakably to the fact that Norcott and his dogs had gone through the rotten ice close to shore and drowned.

"Borden went back to his cabin and a couple of days later he was able to travel to the river, where he got help from an oil-rusher. When he reached Fort Norman he reported the case to Jack Kerr and went out to Edmonton.

"When Kerr reached the place a big snow had fallen. He did see where the ice had been broken, but when he tried to investigate he went through and nearly drowned. He says he is going back this summer to drag for Norcott's body. If he finds it, that will close the case."

"And there would be no prosecution?" Peggy asked.

"There would be no one to prosecute. Even had Norcott not drowned, there would be no case against him. There is no law forbidding him to leave his partner ill in a cabin or getting drowned doing it, but he had better not show his face in this country again. There are some things that only the north's unwritten code can touch. His case is one of them."

"And there is no suspicion of Borden?"

"Suspicion of what?"

"That he may not have told the truth?"

"What object would he have in doing otherwise? If you knew him, and the circumstances, you would see that there is no reason to doubt his story."

"But I do know Borden," Peggy said.

STEWART looked at her closely. Something in her tone had disturbed him.

"Did you know the other fellow, too?" he asked.

"Yes. We were engaged to be married."

Stewart flushed. "I say!" he exclaimed. "That wasn't fair! I wouldn't have talked that way if I had known."

"That is exactly why I have acted as I did," Peggy replied. "What I want is the truth and now I am going to ask you not to mention our talk to any one. I came here knowing nothing except rumor and only with my faith that what has been told me is untrue. I wanted the story as it is known here and I thank you for giving it to me as you have."

"And you've come up here just to get the story?" Stewart demanded.

"And to prove that it is not true," Peggy added. "I know it is not, and I know that Paul Norcott was the victim, not the criminal, in this affair.

"But now I want some more information. I am going on to the oil fields and I am going to this lake where the accident happened. I know nothing about that country and I want you to tell me what you know."

Stewart got a map of the river below Fort Norman and pointed out the district which had been staked, the site of the Victorian Oil Company's well and the location of the claim Paul and Borden had selected the previous winter.

He told her where Corporal Kerr probably would be found and showed her the locations of the various oil-rushers' cabins.

Peggy thanked him and when she arose to leave she asked:

"You have seen men from the oil fields since winter?"

"Many of them. They came up on the ice all spring and some have come by canoe this summer."

"And there has been no hint that Paul Norcott is still alive?"

"I am sorry, Miss Thorpe," the embarrassed fur-trader answered, "but I've never heard a word of such a thing."

"And if he had been alive, if he still is, he would have been seen by some one?"

"I don't think there is any doubt of it. He and Borden didn't have enough grub to last them more than a few weeks and it is now more than four months since this happened. Besides, only sixty-five or seventy men came in from the outside all winter and I've seen them all."

Peggy took the blow calmly.

AN HOUR later Peggy and Jimmie were at the one well of the oil fields. Two watchmen left through the winter by the Victorian Company were on the bank and paddled out to the plane in a canoe.

"This the company machine?" one of them asked.

"No," Jimmie answered. "Can we tie up here?"

"That's the second time we've been fooled," the watchman said disgustedly. "An airplane landed here yesterday and you come today, and we're expecting one from the company with grub and other things."

"Where is the other bus?" Jimmie asked.

"There was two fellows in it and they was looking for Jack Kerr of the Mounted. One of them was here in the winter and he was mighty anxious to see Jack. He's got a claim across the river and he's gone there now. I suppose he's tied up somewhere behind Bear Island."

"Did he see Kerr?" Peggy asked.

"No, ma'am. He didn't see the corporal. Kerr got here from down-river just a few minutes ago. He's there on the bank now."

"I want to talk to him," Peggy said as she glanced shoreward and saw a red-coated figure.

Jimmie and the watchmen tied the airplane to a stake they had driven into the river bottom preparatory to the arrival of the company plane and he and Peggy were paddled ashore.

Corporal Kerr had taken a seat on a pile of piping beside the well and Peggy walked up to him at once.

"My name is Margaret Thorpe, I live in Calgary, and I have come up here without a pass," she began at once.

Kerr had risen at her approach and stood with hat in hand while she spoke. He was not a large man and there was a certain diffidence in his bearing and in his expression which did not deceive Peggy. She guessed at once that he was one of the few members of the old Northwest Mounted who had survived the war and the reorganization of the force and that she had to deal with a man entirely different from the youths she had seen in the south.

"When did you leave Edmonton?" he asked, apparently ignoring her statement that she had come without permission.

"We left Athabasca Landing yesterday morning and stopped at Fort Resolution last night."

"Got enough gas to get back?"

"I think we could reach Fort McMurray with good luck."

"What did Trenery tell you at Resolution?"

"He placed me and my pilot under arrest and said he would hold us for the first upriver boat."

"How did he happen to let you go?"

"He never intended to."

"Then you're fugitives, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why do you tell me all this?"

"Haven't you seen the man who came in an airplane yesterday?" Peggy countered.

"No."

"He left Edmonton ahead of us and carried orders to all members of the force to arrest us and turn us back."

"Well"—Kerr grinned delightedly—"you and your airplane certainly have put one over on the Mounted. You must have had a mighty strong reason for coming."

"I did," Peggy answered. "The man

who brought the orders to turn me back is Wayne Borden."

"Borden!" Kerr repeated. "He's the man who——"

"Exactly."

Kerr glanced at her sharply. "You knew the other fellow, Norcott?" he asked.

"We were engaged to be married."

Again there was a swift, sharp glance.

"What's your idea of this thing?" he asked.

"I imagine it coincides quite thoroughly with yours."

Kerr started.

"Borden told me the story when he arrived in Calgary in the spring," she continued. "It was practically the same story Stewart told me at Fort Norman two hours ago."

"Why didn't you believe it?"

"Because I've seen Borden and I knew Paul."

"What else?"

"The two men had an agreement that they were to go fifty-fifty, Borden giving his citizenship right to file on a claim and Norcott putting up the money. The agreement stated that in case either man died everything was to go to the other. Borden didn't tell you that when he reported the case last winter, did he?"

"No."

"And when you went in to investigate a snow storm had covered the tracks."

Kerr nodded.

"And you had nothing to go on except Borden's story and the fact that some one or something had gone through the ice at the spot where he said Norcott had drowned."

"IS IT your theory that Norcott did not drown?" Kerr asked.

"It is my faith and hope that he did not." For the first time Peggy's voice trembled and she looked away.

"And you came up here solely because of that hope?"

"Yes, and to clear Paul's name. I know he never did such a thing. I know he is the victim, not the guilty one, and before I go back I am going to prove he is and that Borden wanted to get the entire ownership of the claim. You have heard the claim is valuable, haven't you?"

"I've heard they all were, from those who own them."

"But when Borden and Paul came up here they knew one of the Victorian Oil Company's geologists. He was an old friend of Paul's. They filed only after getting information from him."

Again Kerr shot one of his quick, calculating glances at the girl. She waited a moment for the import of her statement to sink in and then continued:

"And the man who came in the airplane with Borden is a rich oil man from the States. I don't know his name but I was told so at Fort Resolution, where they stopped."

Another of Kerr's quick glances indicated that he understood. Peggy hesitated a moment and then asked the question she had most wanted to ask since her arrival at the oil well.

"You have been here all winter, in touch with the oil fields?"

"Yes."

"You know all the rushers, all those who have staked claims?"

"I have seen them all."

"And you have never heard a rumor or suggestion from any of them that Paul is alive?"

"Not one."

"And you don't believe he is?"

She had asked the question steadily, without a trace of emotion, and Kerr paid her the compliment of granting that her courage was as great as it seemed when he answered:

"I can't see how it is possible."

Peggy hesitated a moment and then said:

"Mr. Stewart told me at Fort Norman that you were going to drag the lake before you made your final report on the case."

There was just the suggestion of a question in the statement and Kerr understood.

"I haven't done so yet," he told her. "I had some other work to attend to farther down-river and have just arrived here. It was my intention to go over there tomorrow. I wonder who this is?"

While they talked Kerr had glanced frequently toward the river and Peggy had seen that a canoe coming from the big island on the other side of the vast river was attracting his attention. A moment before the canoe had landed and now Peggy saw that its occupants were two Indians and a white man.

The latter was short, thick-set and quick in his movements, most evidently a man from the cities. But what surprised Peggy was his rush toward Jimmie Barnes.

"Well, you young dare-devil!" she heard him shout. "What are you doing up here?"

Jimmie's voice was lower and the words did not reach Peggy.

"If it ain't Mr. Finley!" he exclaimed. "You certainly can smell oil a long ways."

"It looks as if you had followed my advice about doing the same thing. Did you get hold of a claim?"

"I haven't had time. You see, I brought some one up here and I'm working for her now."

"Her! You don't mean a woman flew up into this forsaken wilderness!"

"Yes, and she's a game one, too. How did you come? In that?" He indicated the canoe.

"NOTHING like that for me, kid," Finley answered. "I came in less than two days from Edmonton."

"With Borden?" Jimmie demanded.

"Yes. You know him?"

"I never saw him but I know who he is. What you doing with him?"

"He's got a claim he's asked me to look at. I want to buy in here and from all I can learn he's got a good one."

"That fellow's a crook!" Jimmie declared hotly.

"So?" Finley asked without interest. "May be, but he won't beat me out of anything."

"But that claim doesn't belong to him."

"Oh, he told me all about that. Partner tried to shake him and drowned doing it. Served him right. Borden's title's O.K."

"If he's on the square why did he try to have us arrested before we started and why did he leave orders for the police all down the river to hold us and send us back to Edmonton? I tell you, Mr. Finley, he's a crook."

"Slow up, kid," the oil man said sternly. "What's all this about his trying to get you arrested? I was with him and I didn't get any of it when we stopped at three or four places. You're seeing things."

"I'm not seeing anything except what's straight. Borden took a policeman in his bus to Athabasca Landing to arrest us when we were leaving. I fooled him and we got away. Then when we had to stop at Fort Resolution—the policeman there arrested us. Said Borden brought the order."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Miss Thorpe and me. She's the woman who owns the bus."

"What's Borden's idea in having her pinched?"

"She was going to marry his partner, the fellow Borden says ran off and left him, and she never believed Borden and came up here to prove he is a liar and a thief. And she's going to do it, too, Mr. Finley. Better lay off that fellow. I tell you, he's a crook."

"You mean that girl up there talking to the policeman flew all the way from Edmonton to prove her sweetheart didn't play this dirty trick on Borden?"

"That's what she did, and she'll prove it, too. When she starts after anything she gets it. You watch her."

"Guess I'll have to talk to her," Finley said as he started up the bank.

He didn't waste time or words. When he approached Peggy he took off his hat and bowed.

"Miss Thorpe," he said, "my name is Finley, San Francisco. This young devil who brought you up tells me that Borden is trying to sell me a claim that he doesn't rightfully own. Is that true?"

"Legally, he alone is owner of the claim if his partner is dead," Peggy replied. "He says they had an agreement that if one man died sole ownership was to go to the other."

"There is no doubt about the death of his partner, is there?"

"The body has never been recovered."

"And if it is?"

"Then the claim is legally Borden's, when he files the agreement, and he can do as he pleases with it."

"Did Borden try to stop your coming up here?"

"Yes. We were arrested on orders he brought from Edmonton."

"Why do you suppose he did that?"

"He knows that I do not believe Paul Norcott did such a thing. He knows I am fully aware of what he did and he does not want any one with my interest in the matter investigating the case."

"What do you think about it?" Finley demanded of the corporal. "Have you looked into it?"

"Only partly. I am going back to their claim tomorrow morning and drag that muskeg pond."

"And you're holding your opinion?"

"Of course."

Finley turned and looked at Jimmie. His intent, brusk manner vanished.

"Learned to swim yet, kid?" he laughed. "Miss Thorpe, you don't know what a chance you took, having this fellow pilot you up here. He's too ignorant, altogether too ignorant. Why, he doesn't know the first thing about being afraid."

He told the story of his flight to Reno. Peggy and Kerr smiled at his humorous account but both caught the note of affection in his voice.

WHEN Finley had finished he suddenly became serious again. He looked at Peggy and then at Kerr, keenly and calculatingly.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Let me in on your combine, will you?"

"Combine?" Kerr repeated coldly.

"Sure. Miss Thorpe wants to prove this fellow never did what Borden says he did. You want only the truth of the thing. I want to see a game girl get what she's after. So I'll keep stringing along with Borden, look at his claim and all that, and if there's anything I can do to help I want to do it. How about it?"

"What's your interest in the matter?" Kerr demanded.

"I've got plenty of 'em. I owe this kid a lot. I'm for any girl who'll take the chances Miss Thorpe has just to prove she knew a man when she saw one. And I never did like to be gypped. I want that claim but I want to get it on the square all the way through, not just legally."

Peggy extended her hand and there were tears in her eyes, though her voice was steady when she said:

"I accept, and I thank you, Mr. Finley."

"Don't mention it," he replied. "Can any of you folks tell me where the Victorian Company's geologists are? I want to talk to them and I don't want Borden to know."

"Where is Borden now?" Kerr asked quickly.

"He went in to his claim," Finley said. "Started this morning with two Indians in a canoe. Said he wanted to see if the route was passable before taking me."

Peggy and Kerr glanced quickly at each other.

"It's a long while before night," the corporal said casually. "I guess I'll start over to that pond now."

CASUAL though his tone may have been, Corporal Kerr did not waste time.

"It's more than fifteen miles to that claim," he said as he glanced toward the airplane. "Five to the mouth of the creek behind Bear Island across the river, and then ten more up a crooked stream."

"I'll land you at the mouth of the creek in ten minutes," Jimmie declared.

"There's a couple of Indians and a canoe over there I can get," Kerr said. "My ropes and stuff are down here in my own canoe. Where did Borden leave his machine?"

This last was directed at the American oil man, who had been watching Kerr with most evident approval.

"Near the mouth of a small stream," Finley answered. "He hired some Indians to take him up in a canoe. I got the only other Indians there to bring me over here."

"Then I'll have to take my own canoe and Indians and paddle across."

"Tie it on behind and I'll taxi across," Jimmie offered. "The Indians can ride in it. Hurry up."

Peggy, Jimmy and Kerr were paddled out to the airplane. The canoe was fastened between and at the rear of the two pontoons and the Indians left in it. Kerr and Peggy sat in the passenger's seat, the motor was started and the ropes cast off.

They found Borden's airplane moored at the mouth of the creek and Jimmie turned his machine along the shore of Bear Island, where it was tied in a sheltered place. In a few minutes Kerr, Peggy, Jimmy and the two Indians were bound upstream.

After the marvelous speed of her flight from Athabasca Landing, Peggy found the slower canoe and the twisting creek tedious. The fact, too, that she no longer soared high above the earth but was down upon it and could see it in detail, and that everything she now saw was intimately connected with Paul, had a depressing and unnerving effect.

She wondered if he had stopped to camp in one of the sheltered places beneath the spruce, if he had lain there watching the stars and thinking of her, if he had suspected Borden of possible treachery, if even then the Canadian's evil plans were forming.

"The winter trail they took leaves the river here," Kerr broke in on her thoughts as they rounded a bend. "We'll go on a little farther and then portage over to the pond. This stream goes to their cabin after a big curve."

After half a mile of difficult portaging they emerged on the shore of the muskeg pond. It was necessary to cut poles to get out to the water but once they were in the canoe Kerr directed it toward the opposite shore.

"There's the blaze I made last winter to mark the spot," he said as they approached. "I went in myself. There's always rotten ice along the shores of these ponds. Heat generated by decaying vegetable matter or springs make it like salt-water ice. You go through without any warning. Wait!"

The last was a sharp command and he dug his paddle into the water and stopped the canoe.

"BORDEN'S been here this morning," he said after a moment's survey of the shore. "See where he cut those trees and built a sort of pier out over the mud and water?"

The Indian in the bow broke into an excited chatter and pointed with his paddle. The canoe moved forward a few feet and stopped again. Kerr swung it so that he alone, sitting in the stern, could look down into the dark water.

After a moment he resumed his paddling and spoke to the Indians. The canoe quickly sped on to the end of the lake, where higher, rocky ground afforded a firm landing place and the only possible camping spot on the swampy shore.

"Miss Thorpe, I think it would be better if you remained here while we go on with the work," he said.

"I understand," Peggy answered as she arose. "But tell me what you saw back there in the water. It wasn't——"

"It was not," Kerr said quickly when she hesitated. "What I did see was evidence that Borden has been there this morning. He came around the shore, cut those trees, built a pier out over the mud and hauled up the toboggan. I'm not sure, but I think he opened the load and then tried to shove it out into deeper water. I'll find out soon."

The camp supplies were unloaded, a smudge was built to drive the mosquitoes from Peggy and the four men got into the lightened canoe and paddled back to the scene of their investigation.

Kerr first went ashore and spent some time examining the place where Borden had been only that morning. Peggy watched intently but when at last he returned to the canoe and the men got out the lines and grappling hooks she broke into uncontrollable weeping.

It was the first time she had really given way. Until that very moment she had never completely abandoned hope that Paul was alive. Despite the evidence she herself had gathered, despite the firm convictions of Kerr and Stewart that Paul could not have remained in the country or have escaped from it without their having heard of his doing so, the trust had persisted that somehow he had evaded death, that somewhere he was waiting for her to come to him.

The first paroxysm of grief having passed, Peggy stumbled to her feet and went back from the shore until the thick spruce hid all view of the lake. There she sat down, muscles and nerves tense, forcing self-control until news came from the searchers. She could not bear the thought of watching them when the hooks brought to the surface the dread thing she feared.

In this condition she had no sense of time and little regard for her surroundings. She did not feel that some one was near and the thick moss deadened all sound of footsteps as a man approached. Ten feet away he stopped and took off his hat.

"Well, if this wouldn't jar all the teeth out of a hen's mouth!" he muttered.

Peggy heard only the sound of his voice and glanced up. She saw a man about fifty years old, though his gray hair and thick beard, deep-wrinkled and sunken cheeks, gave him the appearance of one much older. Yet the grizzled head was set on the body of a man in his physical prime.

"How do you do, ma'am?" he said. "You're not lost or something like that?"

Peggy shook her head.

"I wouldn't 'a' been surprised if I'd seen a wampus sitting there, but a woman, a white woman—well, I haven't had a drink since I left the Yukon and that's going on nine months now."

From where he stood he could see the lake and Peggy searched his face anxiously as he watched the men in the canoe.

"I wonder what Jack Kerr thinks he's doing out there," he said slowly.

"What do you know about what Jack Kerr is doing?" she demanded.

"Enough." He continued: "I mean he's wasting his time, dragging that mud."

"You think there's nothing to find?" Peggy could not keep the eagerness from her voice.

"Nothing *worth* finding," he said. "When a man goes off and leaves his partner to die like that fellow did, and he gets drowned doing it, I say to let him rot there in the mud. It's where he belongs."

PEGGY was on her feet before he had finished. He had not looked around and with the last word she was in front of him, her face contorted by fury and her hands reaching claw-like for his beard.

"You vile, twisted, yellow beast!" she cried in a voice broken by fury. "You lie! You lie! You know you lie!"

He stared at her in amazement as he took a step backward.

"You seem to know more about this than I do, ma'am," he began awkwardly. "I was just saying what I'd heard and I never thought how you might be his sister or something like that. I'm sorry."

"You had no business saying it!" Peggy flared at him, and again he retreated before her fury. "The man they are looking for never deserted his partner. He couldn't. It wasn't in him. And I'm going to prove that you and every one else who says what you did is a liar."

"Do you mean, ma'am, that you come all the way up here just to do that?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes. I came in my plane, right behind Borden, even when he carried orders to the police to have me arrested. And if you want something to roll around under that tongue of yours, watch Borden. If any one was deserted on this lake last winter you can count on one thing, and that is that Borden did the deserting."

"You think so?" the old man asked, and there was a new stern note in his voice. "Why?"

"I know both men."

"Was you by any chance a relative of the lad they're looking for out there, ma'am?"

"No."

"I see, and I'm sorry, ma'am, for what I said. I understand, and Paul was a mighty lucky chap."

"Paul!" she repeated breathlessly. "You knew him?"

The old man nodded.

"Tell me. How long before this happened did you see him? How was he?"

"He was looking right fine when I saw him last, ma'am, about two hours ago!"

FOR a moment Peggy stared at him without speaking. Ever since Wayne Borden had left her office six weeks before, she had driven herself on with the faith that Paul was alive and waiting for her. That faith had spurred her on in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, even in spite of her own reasoning powers.

Yet when that evidence and that reasoning were refuted and her faith was justified by the words of this stranger, the sheer wonder of it was stunning in its effect.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she cried passionately. "But where is he? Quick! And why didn't you tell me at once?" She jumped to her feet excitedly. "I must call to Kerr and tell him."

With a bound the old man was in front of her.

"Don't do that!" he commanded so savagely she drew back. "Sit down. Don't let Kerr see you."

There was no warmth or twinkle in his gray eyes now.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Come back here and sit down while I tell you. Then you'll see."

Peggy dropped to the moss beside the smudge and stared at the thick, snake-like coils of smoke rising from it.

"I'll begin at the beginning," the man said as he sat down.

"My name's Hall—Dave Hall," he said. "When we heard last fall about there being oil over here on the Mackenzie a few of us in Alaska thought we'd like to shift to huntin' the black gold for a change and we come across the mountains. I got through about the middle of February and as soon as I see how the ground lay I come over near this lake.

"I got here about noon and made a good camp right back of where we're sitting, intendin' to prospect around a bit and maybe stake a claim. I was kind o' shy on grub and that afternoon I set some rabbit snares along the shore down past where Kerr is now. After dark I went to get my supper out o' them.

"While I was looking at a snare I heard some one driving a dog team through the bush behind me and pretty soon I saw a man go out onto the lake. It was dark but I could see him plain against the snow. He was just ahead of his dogs and I was going to call and ask him to stop awhile, thinkin' maybe I'd learn something about the claims hereabouts, when I see one of his snowshoes had broke through.

"He jerked it out and the next one sunk but he was quick and got free and run ahead. The dogs come right behind him and all of a sudden the whole team and toboggan went in. I thought of course the fellow'd stop and help his dogs but he just kept on runnin' until he hit solid ice.

"I started to the ice, and then I heard a holler right close and see another man run out to the dogs. He tried to get them out and all of a sudden he went in up to his neck. He called and called but that first fellow never come back.

"The lad in the water was in a bad way and I ran to help him. But just before I got to the lake he rolled out behind a bunch of willows growing out in the water.

"Now I've lived in the bush all my life and I've seen some funny things happen and I've burned my fingers quite a bit bein' too rash. When I see that lad lyin' there quiet and hid by the bushes and the dogs drowning and the first lad standing out there near the center and never making a move, I knew there was something up that was none of my business and would probably bring me a lot of trouble if I messed into it.

"So I kept quiet, watchin' things, and after a while when the dogs quit fightin' to get out and all was quiet the lad out on the ice just turned and beat it out o' there. I could see him, just a kind o' blur against the snow, and pretty soon he was gone.

"It was fairly cold that night and I knew the lad who'd been in must be nearly froze. He was just gettin' onto his feet when I run up and his clothes was froze so stiff he could hardly move. I took him over to my tent and chopped the clothes off'n him and got him warm and dry and put a good meal into him and by mornin' he was all right."

"AND that was Paul Norcott!" Peggy could not repress the exclamation. She had been leaning forward in her excitement and her eyes were blazing and her cheeks were flushed.

"Yes, *that* one was Paul," Dave Hall said with ostensible accent.

"But what has he been doing all this time?" Peggy demanded. "Why hasn't he let me know? Why should he keep hidden from Kerr?"

"Now, one at a time. First, after a week we was partners. We hit it off together right away and between us we've got the best oil claim on the Mackenzie. I've been a Canuck ever since the Klondike days and I can file, while he can't, but he owns his half just the same.

"Now, about his lettin' you know. He did all he could. He wrote you a letter tellin' all about what happened and how he couldn't get out until the last boat up-river this fall. I started it to Fort McPherson myself in time to catch the Mounted's mail out to the Yukon and it was only a month ago that we heard the fellow who took the letter never got through.

"That's the only time I've seen Paul weaken. He was for droppin' everything and goin' right out because he knew you'd be worryin'. But I calmed him down. Told him if you was worth all he'd done you'd stick."

"But still I don't understand why he should not want Kerr to know he is alive," Peggy said.

"They hadn't got along very well together. Borden wasn't the sort any man could get along with alone in the bush through a winter. Paul says he suspected Borden was figurin' on some way to ditch him and before they started for Fort Norman that day—they was just going down for grub and mail—and before they started he tucked the agreement into his pocket instead o' leavin' it with some other papers of theirs they packed on the toboggan.

"Borden never intended to kill him.

It was just a plain, dirty trick, takin' advantage o' that rotten ice.

"So Paul just lay low. He knew Borden would come back this summer and try to sell that claim. And he knew, too, that Borden would come here and lift that toboggan to get the agreement out of it.

"We kept watch and sure enough Borden come yesterday and he hikes right up here and this morning he fished up the toboggan and undid the load and when he couldn't find what he wanted he shoved it back in. He never tried to find Paul's body. Me and Paul lay right here and watched him all the time."

"But Kerr should know it," Peggy protested. "Every one should know it."

"They will in time, but Kerr and his laws can't do anything to Borden. And Kerr and his laws can stop Paul from doin' what he ought to do, what he's probably doin' right now."

PEGGY stared, wide-eyed and with trembling lips.

"You don't mean—" she began, and then stopped.

"I mean he's going to be his own judge and policeman."

"But if he does that! Don't you see? Then Kerr could arrest him. Paul can't! We mustn't let him murder Borden."

"Now don't you be afraid for Paul. He's not a fool and he won't give Kerr any chance at him. But for four months now he's been talkin' and plannin' and thinkin' of what he's going to do to Borden and if you knew how he feels about it you wouldn't want to stop him."

"Do you mean he has thought only of his revenge, of making Borden pay?" Peggy demanded angrily. "That even now he would rather do this thing than get out to me? Don't you understand? After all these weeks when I've thought he was dead!"

Hall, whose experiences in waste places had not given him much insight into feminine psychology, had not the least idea how Peggy felt. To cover his puzzlement he drew out his watch and studied it for a moment.

"Well," he said at last, "I think it'd be all right to go over now. He's had time enough."

He turned back through the brush and Peggy followed. After a few yards she saw that he had taken a dim winding trail through the swamp that after a mile of twisting, ended suddenly on the bank of a small stream and close to a low cabin of spruce logs.

There were no signs of recent occupancy, though the door was open. Hall glanced inside, stooped down and picked up a small object.

He whirled instantly and as he did so his hand struck the door jamb and the empty cartridge of a large automatic pistol was knocked from it. Peggy saw it and understood his agitation. She looked through the door and saw fresh blood on the rough floor.

"I knew it!" she cried. "While you talked and talked——"

But Hall had run out to the bank of the creek and was looking downstream.

A hundred yards below, Peggy saw a tent and two Indians standing beside it. They were looking downstream and as she glanced in the same direction she caught sight of a canoe disappearing around the last bend. There was only one man in it and even at that distance there was no mistaking Wayne Borden.

THE egoist is always the quick and ready hater. Thwart his plans, disagree with him, belittle him, and a flood of wrath is loosened.

Paul Norcott had always been modest, not on the surface alone but inherently so, and in all his life he had never experienced intense personal hatred for another individual. If he were affronted or injured he felt disgust rather than resentment and in the future he avoided or ignored the offending individual.

But when he tried to pull the dog team from the hole in the ice into which it had fallen and the brittle crust gave way beneath his own feet and dropped him into the slime, his first thought was not of his own impending death but of its effect on Peggy.

From the time he had left Edmonton on the first ice of the early winter he had considered his life as something belonging not to him but to her, as something he held in trust and must preserve. While he had insisted on taking the risk to insure their happiness, he had recognized the fact that she held certain rights, that he really belonged to her and must take himself safely back.

Thus, as he struggled in the thin mud of that muskeg pond and called to Borden for help he was confronted not so much by the thought of his own death as by the thought that Peggy was waiting for him to come to her. Borden, standing safely on the ice, watching his desperate struggles, became not the murderer of Paul Norcott but the despoiler of Peggy's happiness, cheating her of life and love, robbing her of the man she had chosen to be her mate.

In that moment his hatred was born. It was too great, too gripping, to be disorganizing. It brought, rather, an unalterable purpose and it even gave him time to perceive exactly what was going on in Borden's mind and to plan how best to thwart his partner's scheme.

It was thus, when at last he rolled free, that he kept behind the willow brush and remained silent. He knew Borden would wait a few moments and then, when all was quiet, go on with the firm belief that only death lay on the trail behind him.

In the months that followed this, hatred and the revenge he planned never left Paul's mind. He knew Borden would return to Edmonton and tell of his partner's death, and he knew Peggy would hear and believe. Through Dave Hall he heard what Borden had told Kerr at Fort Norman and he knew the oil fields were buzzing with the tale of how he had deserted his partner and had encountered quick and just retribution.

From the moment he rolled out of the water Paul Norcott began to plan his revenge. He and Dave moved camp at once and a few days later a snow storm removed all trace of their having been near the muskeg pond. They selected a claim a few miles away. Dave filed on it and together they built a cabin and did the necessary work. And all the time Paul's hatred grew.

He was at the mouth of the creek when Borden's plane arrived, had been waiting there a week, and from the moment Borden started upstream in a canoe he was followed.

As Paul expected, he went first to the little pond to raise the sled and secure the agreement that would give him full ownership of the claim. Paul and Dave watched him and chuckled when he failed to find it, and then Paul slipped back into the swamp and along the trail to the cabin to wait for the supreme moment.

He was hidden behind the door when Borden pushed it open. For a moment the Canadian waited until his eyes became accustomed to the dimness, and then he stepped forward. There had been a small, hollow space in an upper log in which they had kept their papers and some money the previous winter and Borden thrust his hand into this.

As he withdrew it, empty, Paul laughed. Borden whirled. His face was white and his eyes were wide. For an instant he stared, completely discomposed; but his recovery was remarkable.

"PAUL!" he cried. "Where—I thought—Why, this is wonderful, old man!"

He paused but Paul remained silent and motionless in the dim light behind the door. Then Borden started forward, his hand outstretched.

"Tell me about it, quick!" he exclaimed. "How did it happen? Where have you been all this time? I was as certain you had drowned as I am that I escaped."

"You didn't stay long enough to be certain," Paul said so quietly that his tone deceived Borden.

"But there wasn't a sound or a movement, and I knew I couldn't do anything without a rope. You can understand that."

"Oh, easily," Paul answered. "I understand, too, why you hurried out with a story of being sick and of my deserting you, and of how you found where I and the dogs had gone through the ice and drowned.

"I understand how you hurried on to Edmonton and told Miss Thorpe I was dead and how you left her with the impression I had been a rotter. I understand how you smeared that story from one end of the Mackenzie to the other.

"Oh, I understand the whole thing, from your first thought as you stood there watching me drown right up to your last, only a moment ago, when you believed you could lie out of it. And I've matched every thought, Borden, all the time I remained hidden here. No one thinks I'm alive. They all believed you. Everything worked out just as you thought, and as I thought, and now——"

With the last word he thrust the door shut with one foot and took a quick step forward.

"You're going to be a sight for the gods when I get through with you!" he cried.

It was then that Paul made his mistake. Countless times he had rehearsed that scene in his mind. Even his speech had become a rote, and always with the last word he had imagined himself kicking the door shut and cutting off Borden's escape.

But Paul had forgotten how dark that cabin was. One small pane of glass served as a window and when the door was closed half of the small room was in darkness.

Borden stood between him and that one small square of light. Paul struck, open-handed, for he had planned to make the torture long and accumulative, but when Borden ducked the blow he seemed to disappear.

For an instant Paul stared, and then a blinding flash came out of a dark corner and he wilted to the floor without hearing the roar that seemed to burst the walls asunder.

After a moment Borden walked cautiously to the door and looked out. For several minutes he stood there as if waiting for some one; when no one appeared he went outside, pulling the door shut behind him. He sauntered on down to the bank of the stream, where he could see the tent his canoemen had pitched, and where he had eaten a leisurely luncheon only a little while before.

The Indians were sitting beside a smoky fire and evidently had not been disturbed by the sound of the automatic, if they had heard the muffled shot at all.

Borden turned back to the cabin. He walked slowly, for he knew he had plenty of time and did not wish to make another mistake.

He hesitated at the door of the cabin. He saw there was only one course for him—he must go on, to the end. And if he acted wisely how safe and sure that end could be! In the past he had been the passive instrument of circumstance. Now the need of action roused him.

First, there was the body.

Behind him was the forest, illimitable, dark and never entered except along the waterways or after snow had covered everything. In the depths of it, far down beneath the moss, no one would ever find a body, especially when no one except himself would ever know it was there.

BORDEN went inside, lifted the limp body to one shoulder and staggered outside, around the corner and into the swamp.

In the soft moss and thick growth his task was herculean, but he was driven by the black specter which he had so narrowly escaped, and which still followed. As his exhaustion increased this specter came closer and he staggered on and on, driven by the thought that each step took him nearer to ultimate safety.

Though he had lost all account of distance and retained only a little sense of direction, at last he let his burden slip to the ground behind a huge, round hummock of moss. His knees were weak, he was gasping for breath and the sweat poured into his eyes and stung them.

Paul lay as he had fallen, on his back, his face ghastly beside the crimson smear. Borden glanced at his former partner and quick hatred seized him.

"You'll never turn up again," he muttered. "I'll be sure this time."

He drew a knife from his pocket and opened it; but as he did so he heard a voice almost at his ear. In helpless terror he slid down the hummock beside the body. The faint sound of footsteps came to him and he peeked through the brush to see Dave Hall and Peggy hurrying past.

Peggy Thorpe, whom he had believed safe in the hands of the Mounted a thousand miles to the south! Peggy, in whose suspicion he had sensed a menace! He knew she was on the old winter trail from the muskeg pond to the cabin and he pictured instantly what she would find when she reached it.

Complete panic seized him. He was caught, trapped and unnerved by the sudden appearance of the one person he dreaded. The knife slid unnoticed from his clutch. He jumped to his feet and, running like a frightened rabbit, darted off through the swamp.

The moment he had disappeared around the bend in his canoe Dave Hall's cursing had ceased and he turned back to the cabin.

"You keep out of here," he said gruffly as Peggy followed him to the door.

The girl staggered to a stump and sat down. She had seen the empty cartridge and the blood on the floor, and she had seen Borden flee.

When Hall came out of the cabin and examined the earth about the door she did not even look up, nor when he started off through the swamp. But a moment later Jimmie Barnes, gasping for breath, stumbled into the clearing beside her.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "There's a fellow lying back here in the swamp nearly dead. He's been shot and I saw the man who did it running off through the woods. I gave him a quick first-aid and came on after some water."

"You say he isn't dead!" Peggy whispered as she rose to her feet. "It's Paul! Where is he?"

Peggy started toward the trail and Jimmie, after filling an old can with water at the creek, ran after her. He soon caught and passed her but she clung to his heels as he hurried along the twisting path.

Suddenly he halted and crouched low. "Look!" he whispered. "See that old man coming through the woods."

"It's Hall, Paul's partner!" she cried. "He's followed the trail——"

"Who's that?" the Alaskan's voice rang out.

"Have you found him?" Peggy called.

She started through the swamp but after a few steps suddenly whirled to the left and dropped to her knees beside a body lying in the moss. Jimmie and Hall were at her side in a moment.

"Don't you worry about him, Miss Thorpe," the pilot assured her confidently. "I saw too many fellows go west in France not to know how they look when they've got theirs."

"He's only creased," Hall added. "It knocked him out and he lost some blood but he'll never die. Leastways, not from that."

As if in confirmation of their opinion Paul's eyes opened and saw Peggy. His lips moved and he whispered her name.

"Paul! Paul!" the girl cried. "I knew it! I knew it! I knew you were alive!"

"And look at this," Jimmie said as he picked up Borden's open knife. "I was following you folks and Borden must have seen you on the trail just as he was going to make sure. You scared him out and I saw him running."

A crashing of brush sounded close by when he finished and as Hall started to his feet defensively Corporal Jack Kerr strode up. He glanced at Paul and then at the others.

"So that's Norcott, eh?" he said.

"He was layin' for Borden at the cabin but Borden got him," Hall explained.

"And Borden is——"

"A couple o' miles downstream by this time, from the speed he started at."

"And by the time I get back to my Indians and portage the canoe over to the creek he'll have a long start. Once he gets into his airplane there'll be no stopping him."

"I'll stop him for you!" Jimmie cried as he started toward the trail.

JIMMIE BARNES was sincere in his offer to help Kerr in the pursuit of Wayne Borden. Even when they had returned to the lake, roused the sleeping Indians and portaged the canoe to the creek, it was still his intention to take the corporal in the airplane and fly to Edmonton if necessary in the effort to catch the fugitive.

But in the long paddle downstream, while he plied an unskilful but willing blade, and when the chase had settled into a monotonous excess of physical endeavor, he had time to consider other features of the situation.

Chief of these was a picture he could not erase from his mind, that of Peggy as he had found her sitting beside the little cabin. He had known from the beginning that she believed Paul Norcott was alive and her courage and determination in the face of all obstacles and dismaying reports had aroused his admiration and his loyalty.

When he saw how near she had come to failure in the end, how Borden's treachery had brought defeat so close, that loyalty and admiration fed a quick flame of hatred.

There was pure chivalry in Jimmy's attitude. He had recognized in Peggy a leader.

Though Kerr drove the Indians and himself, Borden's lead was too great. The canoe dashed out into the river just as the Canadian's airplane was leaving the water a quarter of a mile upstream.

"Hurry up!" Jimmie urged frantically. "I can do only five miles an hour better than he can."

The mere sight of Borden's plane rising into the air and darting away toward the south had aroused him afresh. He pictured the long flight, the vast, desolate wilderness over which it lay and the possibility of Borden's freedom if anything happened to his own plane. Hatred engulfed him and he longed to fly alone above that immeasurable stretch of forest and dispense justice in his own way.

But Kerr was there in the canoe with him, cool and ready. He would get into the plane, take part in the pursuit, carry with him the law and its restraints. And then, as they approached the airplane Jimmie had an idea.

"Say!" he exclaimed as he climbed out. "I've got to look over the motor and she's going to start hard. You'll have time to paddle over there to Borden's camp by the Indians and get Finley's flying suit."

He got out his own flying clothes as he spoke and slipped them on.

"You'll have lots of time," he added as he lifted the hood over the motor.

Kerr hesitated a moment and then got back into the canoe. Jimmie busied himself with carburetor and ignition, though he knew both were all right, having examined them thoroughly at Fort Norman, and as soon as the canoe approached the main shore he began to crank the motor.

It caught quickly and when it was idling he cast off the mooring lines and climbed into his seat. Kerr was just stepping ashore as the machine rose into the air.

Twenty minutes had elapsed between Borden's departure and Jimmie's, and Jimmie knew that Borden was at least twenty miles in the lead and had gained an altitude of five thousand feet or more. At his calculation of five miles an hour additional speed he could not expect to catch Borden inside of six hours unless clever flying reduced the handicap.

Jimmie flew as he never had flown before. Straight ahead without deviation, climbing steadily and evenly, he brought all his skill and natural airmanship to the task.

After an hour's flying Jimmie discovered the other plane far ahead, flying at about the same height. He turned the nose of his plane slightly upward and settled as patiently as he could to the long chase.

A TINY speck high in the sky was now his guiding point and after a while, when he glanced down at the river, he saw it far off to the east. Another examination of the chart told him that Borden was leaving the Mackenzie at the big bend above Fort Simpson and cutting straight across country for Edmonton. A few minutes later he saw that the tiny speck had grown in size and was dropping. He rushed on, exulting that Borden was having trouble, but he still maintained his own height.

He was rapidly overtaking his quarry now and he began preparations for the plan which had come to him in the canoe. He took a heavy monkey wrench, tied a cord to it and dropped it over the side of the fuselage. It swung out behind and when it was ten feet beneath the pontoons he fastened the cord.

Borden was now far below him and, Jimmie believed, wholly unsuspecting. He kept on until the fugitive plane was less than half a mile ahead and then, with throttle wide open, he turned the nose of his own machine downward.

With wires screaming, motor roaring, he dropped faster than any bird of prey. He could see Borden, eyes ahead, apparently moving rapidly upward toward him; then the Canadian glanced over his shoulder.

For a moment he did not move. He stared as if paralyzed and the next instant Jimmie was upon him. He straightened out, flew straight ahead close above Borden's head, and dragged the monkey wrench through the whirling propeller.

Jimmie banked to see if he had been successful. Borden's propeller was gone, smashed to splinters, and Borden himself had tumbled forward. Evidently the wrench had struck his head and stunned him, for he made no effort to shut off the motor, which, relieved of its work, was racing furiously.

Suddenly the motor shook itself loose from the frame, the plane burst into flames, careened for a moment and then plunged earthward.

Peggy Thorpe, Paul Norcott, Dave Hall, Corporal Kerr and Charles Finley were at the mouth of the creek behind Bear Island when Jimmie taxied up to the bank, late that afternoon. He had stopped two hundred miles up-river, tied up to shore and taken a much-needed sleep before resuming his journey to the oil fields.

He grinned delightedly when he saw Paul standing beside Peggy but the grin faded when Kerr confronted him.

"What's the explanation, young fellow?" the corporal demanded. "Why did you give me the slip?"

"I got to thinking after you had gone for the suit that maybe Borden would leave the river at the big bend above Fort Wrigley and head straight for Athabasca Landing," Jimmie replied readily. "I knew that if I waited for you I couldn't get close enough to him to find out, because seconds count when you're traveling a hundred miles an hour."

"Yes, but what did you expect to do if you did catch him?" Kerr interrupted sternly. "You couldn't arrest him."

"Neither could you, in the air," Jimmie retorted. "But it's a good thing I did go or no one would ever know what become of Borden."

"What became of him!" Peggy exclaimed. "What do you mean, Jimmie?"

"Well, he did what I thought he might. He left the river there just as I caught sight of him and he headed straight for Athabasca Landing. I began to overhaul him pretty fast an hour later and saw he was having trouble. When I was about a mile behind him his bus caught fire and he dropped straight into the woods."

All were watching Jimmie intently but Kerr's glance was more penetrating than the others.

"You'll swear to this, take an oath?" he snapped.

"Sure, I will."

"All right," the corporal said. "That's as far as I can go. I'll draw up a deposition and you can sign it at Fort Norman. It looks as if this case was wound up."

A WEEK later Finley, after looking over the ground and consulting a geologist, bought both claims in which Paul had an interest.

"I never let a new oil field get by me," he said to Paul. "I don't know how they're ever going to get the oil out of this place if they do find it in paying quantities. Twelve hundred miles is a long ways for a railroad or a pipe line.

"But if they ever do I want to have my finger in the pie. It may be the biggest thing on the continent, and it may be only a flivver, but I like to take chances. I understand the money end of it was all you came for."

"It's all I wanted," Paul said, "but I want to make over the half that Borden owned to Jimmie. He's earned it. There are some things a man can't pay with money but I want him to understand how I feel."

"Sure. I know. But between us we mustn't spoil the kid. He's gone crazy over oil. Did you know he and Hall are going prospecting together?"

"Yes, but if they don't find anything he'll have a grub stake. I told him about it this morning and he says he's going to get you to take care of the money for him. And Hall and Jimmie will make a great pair."

ON HER first trip up-river that summer the *Mackenzie River* carried Peggy, Paul and Finley back to civilization, for Peggy preferred the longer journey to a flight home. The plane was left for Jimmie and Hall to come out with in the autumn.

"He's a dear," Peggy said as she and Paul stood at the rail and waved good-by to the young pilot. "We owe him so much it frightens me to think of it."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Why, he risked so much, and worked so hard to get me to you, and he did it, Paul, just in time. If we hadn't found you there in the swamp——"

She stopped and the tears came to her eyes, but she smiled through them.

"I suppose you'll never forgive him, though, for being the one who saw Borden die so horribly," she continued. "Dave told me how you felt and how you had planned."

"I don't envy him now," Paul answered. "I hated Borden for months while I thought of you down there waiting for me. But now—well, I'm glad it was Jimmie who saw him."

By the Author of "The Emperor's Old Clothes"

Mr. Collin's Adventures

A Case Containing £100,000 in Gold, Sealed with the Seals of the Bank of England and Shipped in the Custody of a Trustworthy Captain, Disappears. How?

By Frank Heller

II. The Mystery of the Lost Bullion

"BUT are you quite sure of your facts, Lavertisse?"

"As sure as I am that I am looking at you, Professor."

"And are you certain that you heard correctly?"

"Absolutely certain."

"That the consignment will go on the 20th?"

"Yes."

"Bound for Alexandria?"

"Bound for Alexandria."

"And that you made no mistake about the identity of the people you overheard?"

"I am just as sure about them as *they* were that I did not understand a single word of what they were saying. I had three French newspapers in my hand. They asked me whether they might shut the window, and I pretended not to understand. Then they began talking about different matters—and within a few minutes I was able to recognize one of them from a photograph in the *Daily Mirror*. What a boon the illustrated papers are!"

"One of them—which one?"

"Mr. Hoxton. His photograph appeared in the *Mirror* at the last Lord Mayor's election. It has probably figured there before—a man in his position, Professor! But it was on the latter occasion that it impressed itself on my mind. It was his friend who set the ball rolling. Funnily enough, they had not been talking before I recognized him, too."

"Sir Arthur Wade?"

"Sir Arthur Wade, Professor. I am dead certain—Wade of the Foreign Office. It was he who began. He glanced at my *Matin*, and on the front page there was an article on the political murders in the Colonies, India and Egypt—you know—and this probably reminded him of the other affair. I had hardly taken any notice of what they were talking about, when I suddenly heard one of them say: 'And you are not afraid that one of those damned Nationalists will get scent of this business? It would be a nice little windfall for their funds.'

"As soon as I heard the word 'funds' I at once pricked up my ears. The other, Mr. Hoxton, shook his head and said: 'No, no, Sir Arthur, nobody, except myself and the chief director, knows anything about it. We have kept the Nationalists in mind all the time. I can tell you, Sir Arthur—perhaps you know it yourself—it was by a mere fluke that their coup against the last P. & O. didn't come off. Yes, you know it? Fortunately the captain was careful enough to wire for a military escort; otherwise—' Sir Arthur interrupted him and looked at me: 'Damn it, Hoxton, don't you think that this person can understand what you are saying?' I was sitting at the other end of the compartment, Professor! Mr. Hoxton replied laughingly: 'I don't think so, unless he is able to read it off my lips.' "

"They did not know what a sharp hearing you have got, Lavertisse."

"No, they did not, Professor. Sir Arthur then said:

" 'Do you know, Hoxton, that he might almost be an Egyptian?' "

"Ha! Lavertisse, do you consider this flattering?"

"To be quite honest, Professor, I can't say I do. The only Egyptians I have seen are those in the British Museum—I'll be jiggered if they are handsome!"

"The mummies? Well, there are Egyptians of more recent date. But never mind, proceed! What did Mr. Hoxton say then?"

"He laughed at Sir Arthur and replied: 'Egyptian—no fear! A little French windbag, if I am not strongly mistaken. Perhaps a music-hall artist, as he can afford to travel first class.' "

"And you bore that patiently, Lavertisse?"

"I would bear anything for the sake of business, Professor. It does not do to be sensitive when one can hear as well as I do; consequently one has to swallow quite a number of home truths."

"You are a great philosopher in your way, Lavertisse. Well?"

"Then Sir Arthur continued: 'You are right, Hoxton; I suppose he is some little French whipper-snapper. So you do not want a military escort for that boat?' 'No,' Mr. Hoxton replied, 'one might as well shout the whole affair from the housetops. We count the money, seal it and place it in lots of £1000 in the boxes of the Bank, then we stow them in an ordinary packing-case labeled "samples." The captain of the boat has been known to us these thirty years—a sly old dog, he will see to the rest. I am as sure of him as I am of myself.'

" 'But might it not be too big a temptation even for him, Hoxton? One hundred thousand—'

" 'No, Sir Arthur, his honesty would be proof against far greater sums. Don't you remember that it was he who brought the Cullinan diamond all the way from South Africa? No one had an inkling of how it got here and needless to say every crook in the world was hot after it. Captain Selby tricked the whole lot!'

"CAPTAIN SELBY, I reflected. Why can't they mention the name of the boat? But they did not, and they summed up: 'Let us hope that the banks of Alexandria will be satisfied with this amount and not ask for more. We have sent them a good lot in one year.' It was Mr. Hoxton who said this, and Sir Arthur replied: 'Don't be afraid, Hoxton; I hear the harvest is wonderful now we have got Sir William's dikes.' What do you think he meant by that, Professor?"

"Sir William's dikes? Why, of course, Sir William Wilcox. You know that he has restored the old water-works of the Pharaohs in the Nile. This stands to reason. Nothing else, Lavertisse?"

"No, because shortly after that we arrived at Clapham Junction and although I had a ticket for Victoria I got out. I thought that Sir Arthur might have a detective hanging about the station and possibly take it into his head to shadow me on the principle of 'Safety first.' I therefore decided that it was more prudent to get out at Clapham Junction and follow by the next train."

"By Jove! Lavertisse, you are a pearl, careful as a Dutch housewife, and as sharp of hearing as Odin."

"Who is that, Professor?"

"Never mind—just a reminder of times gone by. Well, and what did you do then?"

"Then I went straight to one of the free libraries of the Carnegie Trust and got the *Shipping Times*. Captain Selby and Alexandria—with these clues it was not difficult to find the steamer to which Mr. Hoxton and Sir Arthur had referred. Well, Professor, the steamer is the *Empress of Oceania* and she sails on the 20th, provided all goes well."

Lavertisse finished his report and looked attentively at his friend and employer, Professor Pelotard, alias Mr. Philip Collin from Sweden (although that alias was not known to Lavertisse). They were sitting in the Professor's elegantly furnished smoking-room, and in front of them stood a four-cornered whisky bottle surrounded by some bottles of Schweppe, a big box of De Reskes and a silver ice bucket.

It seemed as if this information had given Mr. Philip Collin food for deep thought. For at least ten minutes he sat without stirring, hands in his pockets, gazing fixedly at a certain spot on the opposite wall—an original etching of Goya's "El Pico d'Oro." Lavertisse, who knew his ways, looked alternately at him and at the etching—a reminder of a certain curiosity shop. Suddenly Mr. Collin moved, stretching out his hand for his glass, gulped down its contents and sank back into his former attitude with the sole difference that now he fixed his eyes upon the bookshelves. After looking at them earnestly for five minutes he said:

"Do you know what £1000 in gold weighs, Lavertisse? Approximately?"

"H'm. Not exactly, Professor; about two or three hundredweight, isn't it?"

"Two or three! At least twelve hundredweight. And there is the rub, Lavertisse. To take a part of the gold would be a trifle, seeing that we know what we know. To take the lot is not much more difficult. But to take the lot and to carry it away with us on leaving the boat—that is where the shoe pinches. You see, don't you, Lavertisse?"

Lavertisse pondered a few moments; then he said:

"Well, and why must we take all, Professor? Why not just a part—only a hundredweight or so."

"Lavertisse!" said Mr. Collin rebukingly.

"But why not, Professor; I don't understand—"

"Lavertisse, when an adventurer has reached such a pinnacle as ours he is under certain obligations. *Noblesse oblige*, Lavertisse. All or nothing. And for this reason I have got to think it out."

Lavertisse sought help from the whisky bottle to wash down the bitter taste of Collin's reproof, and the latter relapsed into silent contemplation of another part of the wall.

Ten minutes may have elapsed in this fashion while his eyes wandered from one etching to another. Finally they rested on a drawing by Guillaume, "The Disconsolate," showing a young Parisian dressed in mourning, who, while kneeling in a grief-stricken attitude in front of her husband's tombstone, is sending furtive glances to an admirer, who hovers in the background. Mr. Collin seemed to be feasting his eyes on all the details of this frivolous little masterpiece when suddenly he jumped up with a shrill whistle, which sounded like a steam engine.

"Eureka! I have got it! Within ten days the gold is ours!"

"How—what do you mean?" Lavertisse stammered.

"Don't you worry. You'll be told later on. Perhaps something unexpected may upset our plans, and then I should have held out hopes that will not be realized. In any case you work better when you know nothing."

Lavertisse nodded, staring at him with a mixture of admiration and mistrust, apparently unmoved by Collin's last assertion.

"And what will be my job, Professor?"

"Your duties will be twofold. First of all, you must find out as much as you can about the packing-cases which Mr. Hoxton mentioned, and what they look like. That will be a bit ticklish, but with money, enterprise and caution you should succeed. After that—but this is really only a whim on my part—I want you to discover what kind of box they will use for packing the gold. You have such an exceedingly favorable reputation at your bank that perhaps you might find out through them?"

"H'm—yes," Lavertisse murmured, "that might be possible. And what will you do, Professor?"

"I suppose you think that I am going to slack and do nothing? Keep cool, my friend. I must play the part of a dock hand, even to the extent of getting up at half-past three A. M., if I want to succeed."

"You want to go on board the—"

"Of course I want to go on board the—and then there are two more things I have to arrange: I must accompany our friend Graham to the station and buy him a ticket to Naples. There he is to—but never mind! And another thing has occurred to me, Lavertisse. Do you not agree that we have sadly neglected the vicar of our parish? Personally I think we have, and the day after tomorrow I am going to look up the old gentleman and apologize to him."

Lavertisse stared at his employer and frowned as though seriously beginning to doubt his sanity. Laughingly, Mr. Collin again helped himself and his companion to whisky.

Everybody's Magazine, April, 1924

My Diary on Board the Empress of Oceania

20th October.

MY DIARY! It is indeed a long time since I kept such a thing—and why, I wonder, do I begin now? I cannot imagine. Perhaps my nerves are forcing me to do so, or it is tension before the die is cast; the same feeling which makes one devour the newspapers or hold empty conversation with strangers (yes, even with oneself) while waiting for the doctor of whose verdict one is afraid.

However, I believe it is the thought of my two friends which makes me write. It is my desire that in one way or another they should learn of my doings, my apprehensions, my fears. If all goes well . . . but, if my plan miscarries, I feel sure that these pages will become common property and so fall under their eyes. Did I say fears?

It is preposterous that a man like myself with many years' experience of fraud—partly criminal, partly adventurous—should feel his hand shaking at the thought of this last enterprise, which is neither more risky nor more difficult than the others. . . . "Last," I have written. Is this an unconscious prophecy? A warning? Am I beginning to grow too old for such things? I ask myself this question and a dozen others without arriving at any conclusion, without being able to find any answer that is not stupid, ridiculous, absurd: there is no greater risk entailed in this plan, which my friends and I have now worked out, than in any of the other twenty which we have already hatched and achieved. And the reward which is awaiting us is so much greater! A hundred thousand—and yet!

We were to leave at three o'clock in the morning. It was rainy; the docks looked more gray and dismal than ever and the East End more sinister in its shameless grime than I had seen it before. In some book or newspaper, I don't remember which, I once read the following: "London, seen in its gray fog, is like a nightmare of Eternity." I had to think of this while I was being driven to the docks—a nightmare of Eternity. But enough of these sentimental outpourings—I am not going to keep this diary just to turn myself into a laughing-stock for *X* and *Y*'s benefit.

Well, we left at 3 A.M. A series of unforeseen circumstances had prevented me from being at the "Three Sailors" where I was to meet *X* to hear whether what we were expecting had come on board. But somehow *X* must have guessed that something untoward had happened, for he came running at the last moment, dressed like a dock-hand, and managed to single me out on the deck where, naturally, I was on the lookout for him. He arrived just as the gangway was being pulled up and looked at me, made a grimace and a gesture whose meaning I took to be: "All right. The expected goods have come and are waiting for you." I nodded quickly to show that I understood and went into my cabin, where I now sit writing.

So far I have not had time to reconnoiter. This I must leave for tomorrow, and after all there is no hurry. Oh, hell! I shall light a pipe and go on deck! I am too nervous—it is ridiculous, though, absolutely ridiculous. A hundred thousand—and no particular risk.

October 20th—Midnight

I HAVE become acquainted with the other first-class passengers and the captain. I have had dinner and a whisky and soda, and have played chess with the parson from Malta. I am no longer so nervous, but neither do I feel sleepy, and so to pass the time . . .

The parson from Malta! Well, he is a rum old fellow! What else can one say of a white-haired old padre who is suffering from consumption, shakes all over when there is a bit of draught from the door, and who is now going back to Malta to get himself buried there. Yes, actually to get buried there—and he has got his tombstone with him on board! He wants to see what the climate will do for him and hopes that it will work wonders. But each time the old parson dwells on the wonderful air and the effect it has had on different people, his nephew surreptitiously shakes his head. In the midst of talk about the climate and other things, the old man suddenly gets another coughing fit and when that is over he gasps:

"Georgie, my boy, it was a good thing after all that I brought my tombstone with me."

"Oh, uncle, don't talk like that."

"Yes, Georgie, we must all be prepared

and ready to look death in the face at any moment of our life!"

And thereupon, before one can pity or contradict him, he suddenly veers round, becoming as gay as a youngster, telling stories, upon my word really amusing stories—and is sunshine personified. The few ladies on board already idolize him, though they consider a tombstone a rather gruesome appendage. But in this respect the old gentleman will stand no protest.

"My dear children," he says, smiling gently at them, "you cannot grudge an old man his last joy in life. You must own it is a very harmless pleasure—is it not—to choose one's own tombstone? Mine comes from my beloved Cornwall where I was born. In this way I shall always have the soil of my native country above me—or at least its stone."

The old man seems to have taken a special fancy to me. Several times while we were sitting at table, he began a conversation in his customary amiable manner, and quite innocently almost cross-examined me. I figured in the ship's list as a gentleman-farmer from Tunbridge in Kent (a place where I actually stayed a long time ago) and by a stroke of bad luck the old man happened to have been vicar there for a number of years and knew the place inside out. I got out of the difficulty as gracefully as I could by referring to my prolonged absence and saying that I had almost forgotten what dear old Tunbridge looked like—but for a moment or so I felt hot and uncomfortable. Then after we had had coffee he came round and asked me to have a game of chess with him (I had casually mentioned that I was fairly good at it). I played quite a fine Queen-Gambit, but his counter-moves were most clever. In the midst of our game he had another coughing fit, and said when it was over:

"I do believe I have guessed your plan! Ha-ha-ha-ha! No, we must prevent that. Checkmate!"

And really before I could recover from the sudden consternation caused by his words (damn my nerves) the old man had won! Then with his most benevolent smile he said "Good night" and hobbled out on the arm of his nephew.

Poor old man—yet who knows? Perhaps he is far happier in his simple, unpretentious life, with one foot in the grave, than I am. He has got the face of an angel.

No, but now I will really get into my bunk. Tomorrow is the day of great deeds. One hundred thousand! If Captain Selby knew . . .

October 22nd.

SINCE I last scribbled in this diary the *Empress of Oceania* has forged steadily ahead. She has crossed the Bay of Biscay—a goodly portion of my expectations have also vanished. Well, not completely perhaps, but . . .

Yesterday morning I made the painful discovery that either Hoxton or Captain Selby had altered his plans.

At first I was so staggered by this that I scarcely wondered at the manner in which it came about. *Y* is on board! *Y*, whom I imagined to be thousands of miles away, is on board as one of the crew, and it was he who gave me this information.

I had gone down into the luggage-hold, where the ship's merchandise is also stored. If I had been caught on one of these reconnoitering expeditions, who would have suspected a sunburnt English squire and sportsman of plans such as mine? Moreover, I have some luggage down there which could at the worst explain my presence. I had scarcely reached the foot of the ladder when some one touched me on the shoulder. I turned round with a smile, ready to offer an explanation—for naturally I imagined that it was one of the ship's officers. But no, it was *Y!*

"Come with me," he whispered, violently screwing up his eyebrows. "This is dangerous and we have no business to be here."

I stared at him and, unable to grasp his meaning, repeated: "We have no business to be here? What do you mean, Y?"

He impatiently shook his head and hastily dragged me up the steps. I was still so bewildered by his manner that I scarcely found time to wonder about his presence on the ship. Only when we had reached the deck did I realize how unexpected it was.

"*Y*," I said, "what on earth are you doing here?"

"Shut up," he said impatiently. "We have got to hurry; I am on board, that is sufficient. I feared that you would be unable to wangle this job on your own—

that difficulties might crop up," he corrected himself when he saw my face. "It is a good thing that I came along, for our plans are all upset. Either Selby or Hoxton has changed his mind, the devil only knows why; but it is a blasted nuisance for us! The thing was never put into the hold at all, as we expected it would be, and if we are going to look there for it, we can search until we get to Alexandria. It is up there."

"Up there?" I repeated mechanically. "Where? Up there?"

"Well, not up in the sky!" he snorted at me. "What's the matter with you? You look as if you were a blooming amateur. Don't you understand yet? It is up there in the small storeroom right under the deck where they keep valuable and other such like property—not exactly jewelry, but things that need watching. The loot which we are after is up there. And now the question is, how can we best get at it?"

I had at last succeeded in regaining my composure. I took *Y* by the arm and said:

"Take me there if you can without risk. Don't let us lose any time."

Y nodded sulkily and showed me the way to a corridor directly under the deck. I could hear the sailors trampling right overhead. He stopped in front of an enormous iron door that was painted in gray and heavily barred.

"Here it is," he remarked. "In there are a hundred thousand pounds waiting to fill our pockets. Double doors made of steel—not exactly a safe, but something like one."

"What is in the adjoining room?" I interrupted.

"On this side, in front, there are ice boxes and the cold storage, and it is impossible to get through from here. The room on the other side is not being used at present except by the doctor, who keeps his instruments there. I believe that in case of need it is used for isolation purposes."

"And there is a guard posted in front of the strong room?"

"Not for the time being, but probably—Look out!" *Y* whispered suddenly. "The engine room, sir? I don't know if I am allowed to show it, but step this way, sir."

I whipped round to see the first officer coming down the corridor and immediately took up *Y*'s cue.

"Oh! So you don't know whether you can show it to me? But I should find it very interesting; I have never yet—"

"All right, sir! Down that way, sir! Allow me, sir!" He saluted quickly, turning to his superior, who had cast a searching look at us and now nodded assent.

WE hastened down the steps to the roaring, rattling engine room. On our way *Y* leaned toward me and shouted through the noise:

"I almost forgot! There is a queer old fogy on board—a parson or a missionary or something. Do you know him?"

I nodded.

"Well, you should have seen him come on board. He has got a case with him as large as the Tower of Babel—his tombstone, so the old bloke maintains. Tombstone! Don't think!"

I cut him short! "Now, *Y*, don't say anything against the old man. He is one of the nicest people I have ever met. He is going to Malta for lung trouble, and in case he should die there is bringing the tombstone along. Why do you mention him?"

"Why? Only because his tombstone happens to be lying in the strong room at which we have just been looking. And that close to our little case!" he shouted into my ear. "You be careful when it comes to business."

"I know that he is very anxious about it," I replied without taking any notice of *Y*'s impertinence. "But how was it possible to get into the strong room, as you call it?"

"There happens to be a hatchway right on deck. But we cannot very well get our little case out that way. There are people passing by both day and night. You will have to think of something else. And now please go up again! It is not safe for us to be seen so long together."

I did as I was told, and, though thirty-six hours have since passed, I have not yet invented another plan. Impossible to get at from the side; double iron doors in front, and overhead somebody always coming or going! Quite apart from the fact that a guard is pacing the corridor the whole night long!

In three days or so we shall be in Gibraltar and five or six days later in Alexandria!

October 24th.

I TAKE up my diary once more, but it looks as if it were going to be very monotonous. Nothing fresh has happened to bring my plans even one step further; rather something has occurred which has thrown them back—if that were possible. And the innocent cause of this "something" is the poor old parson from Malta.

On the same evening on which I made my last entries we were playing chess as usual, he and I, his nephew sitting at his side and the lady passengers of the *Empress of Oceania*, metaphorically speaking, at his feet. The old man was in high spirits and chatting to all of us while he made his moves. As usual he had the better of me. Just as we were in the middle of a really topping game and the old man was smiling and making playful remarks to right and left, he was seized by the worst coughing fit I have ever witnessed. It seemed as if he were going to die on the spot. With both hands pressed to his face he was tossed from one side of his armchair to the other: and no sooner had he recovered from one attack and was gaspingly struggling for breath, when another came on which seemed even worse than its forerunner.

The nephew naturally did all he could to help him, and so did we all, though we hardly knew how to set about it. At last the attack somewhat subsided and the old man sank back into his chair, crumpling his handkerchief between his fingers, with glazed eyes: the handkerchief was saturated with blood. At last the nephew recovered from his fright and called to the steward who appeared on the scene:

"Get the doctor's spare room ready at once. My uncle can't stay up any longer."

"No, no, Georgie, my boy," the old man murmured. "What are you thinking of? I am better already. Please, steward, don't trouble on my account."

But the steward, who like everybody else idolized the old man, had already sped off to carry out the nephew's orders, and half an hour later the old parson lay comfortably in bed. Our description of the coughing fit had naturally alarmed the doctor and he was intent upon examining the patient; but neither he nor his nephew would hear of this.

"It is no use, doctor," the old man whispered. "There isn't any one who can help me. If the Malta air can cure me, well and good. If not, I am ready to render account of my life to the Giver of it. But many thanks for your kindness!"

The doctor nodded somberly, for he knew full well that the parson was right, and all he wanted was to keep him alive until we should get to Valetta. He gave him a sedative and asked Captain Selby to issue orders for every one to keep as quiet as possible in the corridor outside the sick-room and on deck directly overhead. In fact it is now entirely forbidden to go near the old man, and the doctor alone is permitted to visit the patient two or three times a day to see whether he is still alive and to give him a sleeping draught. His nephew stays with him day and night.

Yes, poor old parson, if you only knew how thoroughly you have thwarted all my designs on a certain packing-case in Captain Selby's safe-keeping! As you lie there fighting Death, you do not even dream that there is enough money in the next room to support myself and many others for the rest of our lives. Stored in a common packing-case—side by side with your tombstone! I fear, I fear that it will also be the tombstone of my hopes.

October 24th. Some hours later.

SCRIBBLING again. What else is there to do?

We called at Gibraltar and after two hours, left again. The weather has turned warmer and milder since we left the Mediterranean. There was sunshine all day and the sunset was most beautiful—it reminded me of some of Browning's immortal lines. Huge, golden-red, purplish waves which broke against the cliffs—it was a riot of colors almost like . . . But I lose myself in rhapsodies which are unsuitable to my assumed character as an English squire, or to my real one of adventurer and enemy of society, engaged in the pursuit of a certain shipment of £100,000.

Well, strictly speaking, whether suited to my rôle or not matters little, for it seems to me as if this were going to prove one of my most bungled parts! Not a step nearer to my goal! Everything in the vicinity of the sick-room has to be kept so quiet that even the guard on night duty has received orders to stay at one end of the corridor that the patient may not be disturbed.

Captain Selby paid the parson a visit that evening and remained about a quarter of an hour. When he came up again big tears filled his eyes—yes, really; the sunburnt old salt was crying. He saw me staring at him with surprise and, coming up to me, remarked:

"Yes, I am crying, and I am not ashamed of it. This man is a saint, sir, a saint; and whoever says that he is not I'll——"

He did not finish the sentence but went on the bridge.

Good God, I did not say anything to the contrary. I even agreed with all my heart. But even if the parson is a saint, there are moments when even saints can be in the way, as for instance when one is bent on securing £100,000 worth of minted gold and the above-mentioned saint elects to choose as a sick-room the one next to the place where the booty is kept.

October 25th or 26th.

I REALLY am not sure what the date is. No, I scarcely know whether I still have control of my senses or whether I am mad—whether I am asleep or awake. I have seen an apparition—and have not really seen it, so I must be delirious. My hand is trembling in such a way that I can scarcely write—and I am only writing to try and calm myself a little—my whisky has come to an end.

I ran across *Y* tonight and that was really the beginning of my adventure. *Y*, whom I had not seen since we first met and who was inclined to be almost more blunt and disagreeable than on that first occasion. He made a bee-line for me without caring whether any one saw us or not.

"Nice little pleasure trip, what?" he began. "Has the sea air done you good? And does the food on board agree with you? Confoundedly jolly cruise! Isn't it?"

"Listen, *Y*," I said.

"It's no good, I can't hear at all with that ear!" he shouted. "What are you on board for? To flirt with the ladies and play chess—or are there other reasons? Have you——"

"*Y*," I said, once more looking at him fixedly, "none of this, please. Are you the leader or am I? Answer! And what do you mean by your insinuations? Flirt and chess? Heaven knows how little flirtations interest me; as to chess—do you grudge me my few games with the old parson who is at death's door?"

"Yes, and that in the room next to our money," exclaimed *Y*. "If that does not mean for you the chance of a lifetime, I'll be hanged! The guard isn't there any more, the field is clear—and you, you don't budge!"

I gaped at him. By Jove, it had never struck me in that light! I had always regarded the presence of the parson in the sick-room as an obstacle. But *Y* was undoubtedly right. It need not be an obstacle at all, but quite the reverse.

"Tomorrow or the next day," *Y* continued in the same insufferable manner, "we shall be in Malta. There the old man will be put ashore—and the sentry will be on guard, you may take my word for it. There has been no guard for the last four days now; but you——"

"Shut up, *Y*," I exclaimed, now infuriated by his impudent bearing. "You may rest assured that I have already considered the matter. Before I rest tonight, I shall pay a visit to the room next door to the parson."

With that I left him, not wishing to give him the chance of provoking me further. And tonight, about one A.M., I set out on my expedition. I was dressed in dark pajamas and felt slippers, as is my wont on such occasions—it is a costume that attracts no attention.

By means of extreme care I avoided meeting any one on my way to the passage where the strong room is situated. As *Y* had pointed out, this part of the ship seemed so quiet and deserted that it almost frightened me and made me suspect a trap. Before I slipped into the corridor, the sentry just looked in without going further and, in order to find out how frequently he came to make his inspection, I dived into a recess where the stewardesses keep their brooms and dustpans.

After a good half hour had passed, I again heard the sentry approaching. Everything had been quiet until then. I looked out through a round hole in the door of the cupboard. The sentry stopped at a good distance from me, switched on the electric lights in the whole length of the passage, and glanced down it. Of course, nothing was to be seen, but suddenly there was something to be heard—a racking cough from the sick-room—a cough that sounded as if it would never stop. It was heart-rending. The guard put out the lights, and disappeared.

I let three or four minutes elapse to make sure that he was out of hearing: then I got up and, as quietly as I could, felt my way among the brooms and other rubbish in the cupboard. Without making a sound I found the door, turned a handle and opened it a little. I was just going to open it wide when the most ghastly experience of my life came to me.

The heavy iron doors of the strong room slowly and silently opened, as if moved by the hand of a ghost. The light was dim—the sentry had seen to that—but it was enough for me to perceive a figure crossing the threshold with deliberate slowness. Suddenly, while motionless with surprise—I was still staring into the obscurity of the corridor—the figure turned toward me: I fell backward and do not know whether I cried out or not. If I did not do so, it was only because my throat felt strangled with horror. For there, in the corridor on the threshold of the strong room, I saw—the contour of the body and face outlined in a peculiar phosphorescent glow—none other but myself!

From the sick-room came the sound of another dreadful fit of coughing.

I do not know what happened then, nor how much time passed before I was again able to think coherently. Hours, perhaps—perhaps only a few minutes. Suddenly I found myself dashing across the passage to my own cabin, tearing along without any thought of caution and flinging open the door. My fingers fumbled for a bottle which I knew to be in one of my drawers—they seemed to fumble for hours: at last I held it between my shaking hands and poured the burning whisky down my throat in long gulps. So by degrees I recovered from my nightmare, and five, then ten minutes passed before it held me in its grip again. I could visualize the whole scene: the heavy, half-open door, the dim figure, the phosphorescent glow, my face, everything. A fresh draught from the whisky bottle, and another pause, in which my brain tried to answer the thousand questions which crowded in upon it. And then the vision would recur.

Am I crazy? Was I crazy then? Did my eyes deceive me? But no, that is impossible. I did see clearly, as clearly as now I see this whisky bottle before me. Yes, I saw aright.

Damnation! Not even now, when it is all before me on paper, will this horror leave me. Oh, what would I give for another bottle of whisky!

October 27th.

AN UNFRIENDLY day. My head aches from my drinking bout yesterday when I was trying to make myself forget—no, I do not even want to put it down. I shall never, never be able to forget it. We put into Malta, and, about two hours ago, left just before dusk. It was raining, and what little business the ship had there was quickly dispatched. Nobody went ashore.

Nobody except the parson and his nephew. Did you ever see anything like that old man?

Yesterday morning he seemed to feel a little better. The nephew came on deck for lunch, beaming with joy and telling everyone that the old man had had a good night (I know some one who hadn't); that he had quite a good appetite and affirmed that he already felt the wonderful effects of the air. I need hardly say that the joy over this was very great, especially among the ladies. In the afternoon, a general pilgrimage took place to the sick-room—naturally only for a quarter of an hour or so, and every one spoilt the old man to such an extent that it could not be healthy even for a person of such an angelic disposition. The nephew was radiant with joy, and so was Captain Selby. He stood contemplating the old clergyman, as though he had been his father, and kept on repeating: "Whenever I come to Malta, I shall look you up, and I'll bring you some little heathens from India to baptize."

"Yes, please do," beamed the old man, without seeming in the least offended. "Do, Captain Selby; you are always welcome."

"And I?" came in chorus from the ladies.

"And you? My dear children, why, of course you are welcome."

Then he turned to me: "And you? Will you ever think of your old friend, the parson from Malta? And of our chess?"

I hastened to assure him that I should.

"Now, that is kind of you," he said in his most charming voice, and added laughingly, "For, as you know, I always checkmated you."

Today, after lunch, when the island hove in sight, he even came on deck. The sun was still shining and he was warmly wrapped up, but as soon as it began to turn cooler—and it very soon began to rain—the nephew had the old man carried ashore in a sedan-chair. Before that everybody took leave of him once more and, last of all, Captain Selby, who said:

"Well, and are you taking your tombstone with you?"

"My tombstone? Of course, of course, Captain Selby!"

"But surely, you are feeling better?"

"Oh, yes, captain, but who can say what the morrow has in store?"

The captain shook hands with the parson, and the latter was carried ashore and the unloading of the strong room, which had so excited my curiosity, was begun.

I succeeded in finding a spot from which I could watch the proceedings. The parson's tombstone—in a formidable packing-case—was lifted by a crane and deposited on the quay, and while everybody's attention was engaged by this operation I managed to get a good look into this room through the hatch in the deck.

There were only four or five pieces of luggage in it and there was no doubt as to which was "ours," as *Y* says. It stood in a corner—just an ordinary brown packing-case with cross pieces and some leaden seals. I took a mental photograph of the hold and went my way so that I might not arouse undue attention.

An hour later we left Valetta in pouring rain. The harbor was deserted with the exception of some fishing smacks and a yacht flying the British flag and bearing the name "Onward." "Onward"—that must now become my motto. *Y* will probably yell it into my ears should occasion arise—but I do not think that it will be necessary. Onward tonight, without recourse to the whisky bottle. Onward to the brown packing-case in the strong room with its golden contents. Onward—without paying heed to obstacles—or ghosts, either!

A CLOUDLESS sky and a sea like velvet. A gentle morning breeze which playfully stirs the dark green foliage of the pine groves on the shore, and tugs at the pennants and white sails of the yacht *Onward*. The *Onward* is leaving the harbor of Ajaccio in Corsica, on the wings of the morning zephyr. On her small bridge a sunburnt old sea-dog is setting her on her course; below, in the cabin, three men are sitting over a bottle of champagne, and a copy of the *Daily Mail*. Other papers are lying about.

One of the three—two of them, by the way, look very much alike—sits there with a smile round his lips, without saying a word, and gazing out of the port-hole, while the others address him with eager exclamations.

"Professor, you are a perfect wonder!"

"Really, Graham——"

"One hundred thousand pounds, Professor, and the other man arrested. No, it is beyond words——"

"Lavertisse, Lavertisse! I am really sorry for that man. I believe he was quite a decent fellow, who has gone astray. *Homo homini lupus*. One man's meat is another man's poison. And I did warn him, though unconsciously. That is quite obvious from the diary."

"The diary, yes, by Jove, the most delectable reading I have had for ages. *Diable!* How frightened he appears to have been when he saw himself coming out from the strong room."

"Poor devil! Yes, Lavertisse, and when he heard your cough sounding from my sick-room. My word, you did that cough most extraordinarily well!"

"Nothing compared with you, Professor! I shall never forget your attack before you were carried into the sick-room and the blood and all. It was simply wonderful. As the old parson from Malta you had the sympathy of the whole ship. Even though you had been caught red-handed in the strong room, they would never have believed in your guilt. That is a part, Professor, which you must play often! A masterpiece, by Jove!"

"Ah, Lavertisse, my friend, you are too enthusiastic—and even if you were right, you must know that great masterpieces remain unique. This is my first and last appearance in a clerical capacity. But read this article once more, Lavertisse. I am vain, and I feel that I must make the same remark that a German prince made when he saw the annual Parliamentary report:

'By Jove, and we have really done all that!' "

Lavertisse picked up the *Daily Mail* and read for the third time:

"THE most mysterious crime of the century! A consignment of gold transformed into lumps of lead! Man caught in the act of attempting to steal the lead! The most inexplicable crime, the police admit, they have ever encountered.

"Special wire to the *Daily Mail*.

"The steamboat *Empress of Oceania*, Captain Selby, put into Alexandria on the morning of October 29th. Immediately after her arrival every approach was stopped and the police, who had been informed by wireless, boarded the ship.

"What was the reason of this?

"A most mysterious crime, a crime which has no parallel, has been committed on board. It is not sufficient to say that it puzzles the police; no, it defies all human understanding and, for the present, neither the boldest suppositions, nor an inexhaustible search are able to offer any solution of the problem.

"The steamer sailed from London on the 20th of October. In addition to a small number of passengers and a large cargo of merchandise, it carried £100,000 in gold, intended for the banks of Alexandria and sent by the Bank of England. In boxes, each containing 100 pounds checked by no less a person than the Governor of the Bank himself, Mr. James Hoxton, the consignment had been placed in an ordinary brown packing-case, sealed in his presence with numerous leaden seals.

"This money was placed with extreme precaution aboard the steamer, received by Captain Selby and stowed in the special storeroom reserved for goods of a valuable nature. This room is provided with double iron doors, is inaccessible from either side and kept day and night under the constant supervision of a guard who is specially detailed for this duty. Captain Selby is one of the best known captains in the English mercantile navy, and is as much above suspicion as any Governor of the Bank of England.

"In the night of October the 27th, while the ship was on her way to Alexandria, the captain was roused by the first officer. The sentry, watching the strong room, had suddenly seen, without previously having noticed anything suspicious, its door wrenched open and a man running out, yelling with laughter like a maniac. Calling for help, the guard made a rush for him, overpowered him and, as stated before, sent for Captain Selby.

"The latter, who lost no time in reaching the spot, had no difficulty in identifying the man in question: Mr. Lewis Grossmith, a first-class passenger with a private cabin and, according to his indications, a gentleman farmer from Kent—a statement which naturally proved to be mendacious. When questioned by Captain Selby he only yelled with laughter, and so the former, accompanied by the ship's doctor and the first officer, hurried to the room from which the man had emerged and where the gold had been stored. He found the case, in which it had been placed, broken open, but the boxes into which the money had been packed still seemed to be there; and the captain was just about to retire with a sigh of thanksgiving when his eye was caught by several objects on the floor, which proved to be three or four of the above-mentioned boxes, evidently taken out of the case by Grossmith.

"His utter surprise may be imagined when he found them open and filled not with gold, but with lumps of lead, and when a cursory examination of all the other boxes showed that their contents had also been tampered with in the same way.

"On another page will be found a full report of Grossmith's examination, which does not appear to have led to any appreciable result. He seems to be quite dazed. We rest content with noting the following:

"(1) That the gold was checked by Mr. James Hoxton, Governor of the Bank of England, and sealed in his presence.

"(2) That the case in which the gold was shipped could not possibly have been subjected to any attempt but that of Grossmith—experts are fully agreed as to this.

"(3) That the captain found the case and the special boxes of the Bank of England (experts are ready to testify to them as genuine) filled with lumps of lead instead of gold bullion.

"(4) That once more we refer the reader to what has been said elsewhere about the room in which the case was stored on board the *Empress of Oceania*.

"We also wish to publish the following diary found in Grossmith's cabin and from which it appears that he must have had an accomplice on board, whose identity, however, has not as yet been revealed.

"But is there any one who can unravel this tangle? A case, sealed with the seals of the Bank of England, filled with the Bank's special boxes, is shipped in the custody of a trustworthy captain. Although most carefully guarded, when its seals are broken and it is opened (it is true, by a thief who could scarcely have spent more than a quarter of an hour in the storeroom) it reveals nothing but lumps of lead!

"Sherlock Holmes to the rescue!"

LAVERTISSE stopped reading and gazed with an expression of the deepest admiration at Philip Collin, who, smiling quietly, was emptying his glass of champagne.

"The most difficult of all," the latter remarked, "after I had the inspiration with the tombstone, was to exchange it for the consignment of gold. As I told you before, Lavertisse, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to take only a part of the gold—and that seems to have been Mr. Grossmith's opinion. But to take all of it, that is where the rub came in. The tombstone gave me an opportunity. I had to rack my brains to find the means of effecting the exchange—especially as long as I believed that the case would be put into the usual hold. I therefore made a few reconnoitering trips through the docks near the *Empress of Oceania*, so that Captain Selby should have the opportunity of seeing me. And that is the reason why he had the case stored in the exact place where I wanted it to be, in the strong room where my tombstone was already placed. By the by, I discovered this strong room when I was working on board this ship as a steward."

"But pardon me, Professor, why did the captain have the case placed here? Because he saw you?"

"I'll tell you why, Graham. He saw me in a special costume. I had got myself up as an Egyptian."

Graham whistled. "And so he thought that——"

"Yes, he thought that the Nationalists were on the war-path, and so he decided to store the case in a safer place than the hold—with what result we can read in the *Daily Mail*."

"And when you saw the sick-room close to the other, you conceived the idea with the parson?"

Mr. Collin nodded. "About his illness, yes. After that the rest was plain sailing. Lavertisse had taken good care that we knew what the case and the boxes looked like. There now only remained to pack the lead into the false boxes, the boxes into the case and then to seal it. Thank the Lord, it is no art to get hold of a seal. Then the false case labeled "Tombstone for the Parson from Malta" was packed into a larger one. The only difficult thing was to exchange the genuine case and false tombstone in the storeroom without making too much noise—but after all nobody suspected me, and Lavertisse coughed like a whole sanatorium while I was working."

"And what about that other chap, Grossmith? How do you imagine, Professor, that he got wind of the affair?"

"Ah, well, it is nearly impossible to keep such a shipment a dead secret. This is a well known fact. Perhaps he had certain connections with the bank—that we shall probably never know."

The truth of Mr. Collin's words was brilliantly proved by the affair of the pearl necklace in 1913.

"But I suspected him at once. A shady individual, afraid of the light of day. . . . Just for fun, I made myself up like him, using a little phosphorus. Seafaring people are always superstitious. As I said before, quite a decent fellow, gone off the lines."

Mr. Collin thoughtfully stared before him.

"Well, Professor, and your next exploit?"

"We shall go back to England, Lavertisse, in the yacht which Graham provided for us. And after that I am going to make a donation."

"A donation, Professor?"

"Yes, Lavertisse, a testimonial of gratitude. A thousand pounds for the clergy of Malta."

Look for another of "Mr. Collin's Adventures" in May EVERYBODY'S—out April 15th.

The Draggin'est Feller

Life Among the Loggers in the Southern Mountains

By Hodge Mathes

HE WAS a new man, or he would have known better. No old-timer on the woods gang would have been rash enough to expose himself to the deadly repartee of Draggin' Ellick, teamster ordinary and humorist extraordinary, in the employ of the Clear Prong Lumber Company.

The newcomer had been taken on that morning by Jim Roberts, the woods boss, and put to work on the skidder crew. He was a seasoned-looking roughneck in new overalls and with new rawhide laces in his stout logger's boots. He handled ax and peavey with a skill that excited the admiration of the foreman and the envy of the crew.

When the noon whistle blew the skidder boys hustled down to the mess shack of Camp Six, where the loggers and loaders of the Roberts outfit had already gone through the washing-up process and were seated about the shack awaiting Nigger Pete's artistic rendition of a popular air on the brass dinner bell.

Last of all came Ellick Hendrix. As usual, he had taken time to rub down and feed his big Clydesdales before coming to the shack for his own feed. He was a big, loosely constructed mountaineer, saved from corpulence only by living perforce the rigorous life of a woods husky. His full-fed cheeks shone rosily above a week's growth of reddish stubble mixed with streaks of incipient gray. He crossed the foot-log over the branch and greeted the crowd with stentorian jollity.

"Howdy, ever'body! Hit's the good ol' time o' day ag'in!"

Then he caught sight of the stranger seated on an inverted tub and leaning against the wall of the shack, his hat on the ground beside him.

"Howdy, stranger!" Ellick shouted at the top of his voice. "How does yer copporosity 'pear to segashiate?"

The effort at a pleasantry was older than the oldest man on the works—older than everything in sight except the ancient hills—but not too old to raise a roar of laughter, supposedly at the new man's expense.

All joined in the laugh save the stranger himself. He looked a bit sheepish, but when the last haw-haw had died away, responded cheerfully:

"All right, mister, an' how d'ye come on?"

Ellick Hendrix had not come by his sobriquet of "Draggin' Ellick" by accident. And by the way, lest the plainsman reader find no light from his flatwoods dictionary upon this word "draggin'," he is hereby apprised that in Appalachia, where we are content to keep the English language in the form that was good enough for Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, and Bunyan, "drag" still means, on occasion, to embarrass or silence by swift and telling repartee.

It mattered not to Ellick or his audiences that his jokes were hoary with age and his most effective sallies often utterly pointless. They were delivered with such dispatch and gusto, and followed by such explosions and reverberations of his own laughter that they carried the crowd by storm. The luckless victim could only cower in his shell-hole until the barrage was lifted.

It was unfortunate, therefore, that the stranger in camp should have drawn the enemy's fire by shooting off his innocent little popgun, "How d'ye come on?"

"Why, pardner, I come on my *feet!* How did ye reckon I come? Haw! Haw!" And the gang screamed their mirth just as though they had not heard the same old mountain gag a hundred times before.

The new man looked a little dazed, but said nothing until the merriment had subsided again, when he smilingly observed:

"Well, ye 'low ye drug me that time, don't ye, mister?"

Instantly the answer flashed. "Ye look like the buzzards had drug *you* till ye rubbed all the ha'r offen the back o' yer head!" This had obvious reference to the bald spot the stranger had exposed when he removed his hat. In the roar that followed this second hit, Nigger Pete joined, and his fat sides shook in cadence with the rhythmic dinner-bell solo.

AT THE table the new hand, whose time card bore the name Dave Howell, found himself seated opposite Draggin' Ellick, who, flushed with two fresh triumphs of his wit, was still thirsty for blood. Howell was too busy with knife and fork—mostly knife—to take much part in the boisterous meal-time banter, but whenever he did venture even the most commonplace remark it was greeted with a salvo from the bristling fort across the table. To be sure, the shots went wild, aimed at nothing and hitting nothing, but Ellick's contagious haw-haws never failed to set the company in a roar.

Howell, having been for three days out of a job, ate with an appetite that attracted attention even in a logging camp, and when all the rest were tilting back their chairs and exploring their pockets for goose-quill toothpicks, he was just entering the pie phase of the dietetic cycle. This circumstance offered Draggin' Ellick the pretext for a parting shot.

"Take yer time, pardner," he counseled as he rose to leave. "I 'low yer daddy eat powerful fast an' yer mammy eat a long time, an' ye 'pearently tuck atter both of 'em!"

If Dave Howell, though, was seriously embarrassed by his warm reception at the hands of the camp humorist, he kept the fact to himself. Already established in the good graces of the boss by his deftness in handling logs, he soon won the hearts of the men by an equal deftness in spinning yarns. Some of his first efforts as a raconteur were taken seriously, as they were apparently meant to be, but it was soon a matter of common knowledge and local pride that Camp Six was honored by the presence of a fancy liar of no ordinary gifts.

If there is any rhetorical accomplishment the woodsman holds in equal esteem with brilliant repartee, it is artistic lying. Crude everyday fibbing he righteously scorns as contemptible and unscriptural, but for the veritable whopper that spurns the petty bounds of facts and figures in the higher interests of a spellbinding idealism, he knows no feeling but admiration.

Dave Howell was that kind of liar, a Munchausen of the lumber camps, who wore his title of "Lyin' Dave" with modest but honorable pride. Within a week he had become a formidable rival of Draggin' Ellick as the chief intellectual ornament of Camp Six.

Of evenings in the bunk-house the favorite program would open with the strains of "Sourwood Mountain" or "Arkansaw Traveler" from Fletch McCurry's banjo, or perchance a clog dance by Nigger Pete, whose immense scow-bottom feet flopped and shuffled on the boards like an earthquake set to music. Then over in the corner Dave Howell would begin:

"When I were a-filin' saws fer the Ca'liny Spruce Comp'ny over on the Yancey side of the Black Mountings, they were a old-like feller come thar by the name of——"

"Stop that racket, you fellers!" some one would call out. "Lyin' Dave's fixin' to tell another'n!" And Dave would have the floor, with one of his homely romances, whether of the tallest hemlock, the biggest band-mill, the pullin'est team of hosses, the cussin'est boss, or the luckiest hand of cards that ever was on land or sea.

Seldom, though, did the evening's entertainment end without a sword-clash between Howell and Draggin' Ellick. The gang expected it, and Ellick always strove to please. For him, indeed, it was a never-failing triumph, and cheaply won at that.

Occasionally, though, Howell would put up at least a semblance of counter-offensive. Being nobody's fool in particular, he would sometimes deliver a neat retort that on its merits would have put the laugh squarely upon his tormentor; but Dave's manner was too mild and his humor too subtle for an audience schooled in the knock-down-and-drag-out methods of his rival.

But the lane will turn, and it's a long worm that has no turning, or whatever the proverb says. Also the thickest skin has a quick place under it if only you stick the pin deep enough.

Speaking of skins, Dave Howell was a pachyderm. Now and then, though, there were surface indications that Ellick's pin had found somebody at home. After one particularly vicious thrust the coarse laughter of the crowd had been prolonged by the sight of the victim's face, which had gone white instead of red, while the lips tightened and the warm sparkle of the black eyes turned to a cold glint.

"I 'lowed fer a minute Lyin' Dave was about to git his fightin' britches on," Jeff Lawson confided to Marcus Green, his bunk-mate, as they laced their boots next morning.

"Naw, Jeff," Marcus declared oracularly. "Lyin' Dave's fightin' britches is locked up in his trunk, an' the key's lost! That feller'll take anything offen anybody."

LITTLE did the rough but kindly men of Camp Six dream that tragic events impended, under whose sobering stress all petty animosities would be forgotten in a moment.

All the long, hot Sunday afternoon the crews sat outside the bunk-house, smoking, playing cards, nailing massive half-soles on worn boots, or mending harness. Jim Roberts, the boss, had taken the little narrow-gauge engine, Number Nine, with three men, including Dave Howell, to inspect a new trestle thrown across a ravine near the upper end of the line.

Draggin' Ellick sat on a rude bench at the shady end of the house, from which position he commanded a view up the track. The heat waves from the rails shimmered in the broiling sun. Ellick seemed to be only smoking and dozing, but in reality he was in the throes of cogitation, trying to frame some yet more subtle and mirth-provoking persiflage than had ever fallen upon the responsive ears of his loyal constituents.

Suddenly a figure appeared far up the track, rounding the curve at a rapid walking gait. In a moment the characteristic slue-footed list identified the walker as Dave Howell. For so hot a day Dave was certainly making good time.

"Wonder what's a-pushin' Lyin' Dave," called out one of the skidder crew. "He's shore workin' the ol' skew-leg fer all hit's wuth!"

"Let's git him started on one of his big yarns," said another, and at the suggestion an evil smile lurked on Draggin' Ellick's ruddy face.

"That's a plumb good idy, boys," he said. "I'll banter him to do hisself proud this time, an' then I've jest thought of a brand-new drag I'll git off on him."

And scenting the battle from afar, the gang began instinctively to close in round the champion. As soon as Dave's sprightly limp brought him within hailing distance, Hendrix sang out: "Hey thar, Lyin' Dave, light an' rest yer saddle! Come an' git ye a cheer an' set down by it, an' tell us the biggest lie ye ever heard. We're jest a-pinin' away, like, fer to hear a whoppin' big un!"

But a glance at Dave's face showed that it was on no errand of mirth-making he had come. Tragedy was written there. He didn't even smile at the jester's words, but staggered to a place in the center of the group, where he stood panting, a breathless herald of important tidings.

"FELLERS, they's trouble back up yander! Number Nine busted through that thar trustle at the Gap, an' Jim Roberts is a-lyin' under her, pinned agin a pile of cross-ties. He can talk, though, an' he said fer Ellick to git up a crew of the best men in camp an' fetch axes an' block an' tackle, so's ye can h'ist the trucks offen him. Hit'll be three hours afore the wreckin' train can git up thar."

Instantly Camp Six was astir. Stalwart men, chosen by Hendrix, nearly ran over each other in their haste to grab ropes, pulleys and axes. Ellick was a dozen yards ahead of all the rest when the relief party set out on the six-mile walk. He was not a walker as most mountaineers are, but he felt complimented that the boss, in his hour of need, had recognized him as the man to pick a crew and come to the rescue. He therefore took the lead all the way, albeit with vast expenditure of wind and water, for he was panting like a farrier's bellows and sweating like a leaky barrel.

"Come on as fast as ye can, boys," he stopped now and then to urge, the while he mopped his steaming brow and caught his breath in stertorous heavings. "We've got to keep a-hittin' the grit an' help the boss out o' trouble. An' I reckon I've been a leetle too rough on Lyin' Dave. He was might'-nigh give out when he got to camp, but he said he'd foller us back as soon as he blowed a spell. I 'low I'll let up on draggin' him so hard, seein' how game he's showed hisself."

An hour went by and Hendrix's party had toiled and wheezed four of the six up-grade miles toward the wreck. Thirty minutes more and the hard march would be over. Ellick's feet were blistered and the heavy coil of rope on his back grew heavier and hotter every minute.

Suddenly the Sabbath stillness of the mountains was broken by the shriek of a locomotive from somewhere up the gorge. The weird swelling of the shrill notes indicated that the engine was approaching.

The men stopped in amazement. There was no log train in the woods today. The wrecker could not arrive from Beechmont in less than two hours from now. And Number Nine was lying wrecked in a ravine two miles above.

"What in thunder do you make of that, Ellick?" Wilse Anderson asked between his labored gasps for wind. "Them fellers couldn't 'a' got old Nine on the track by theirselves, could they?"

"Why, gosh, no! Of course they couldn't. Hit's got me guessin' fer shore," Ellick admitted. "Let's go on; we'll be findin' out somethin' afore long now."

They pressed on again, but had gone less than a hundred yards before they heard the whistle again, this time much nearer. As they stood still a moment, puzzling over the strange situation, the rumble of the approaching engine was heard, and in a few minutes the familiar head end of Number Nine nosed round a sharp curve ahead. She was coasting down the steep grade toward camp, and when Hendrix flagged her with his red bandanna handkerchief the engineer brought her to a stop where the relief crew stood.

"Whar in thunder air you-uns headed fer? Huntin' a bee tree?" Jim Roberts asked as he leaned out of the cab window beside the engineer.

"Boss, how in the name of Tom Walker did you git her back on the rails? Was ye hurt bad?" Ellick asked in reply.

"Git *who* back on the rails? Was *who* hurt? What are you-uns a-talkin' about? Ye must 'a' found a still-house instid of a bee tree!" Roberts shot back.

Then Draggin' Ellick began to see light. "What did you fellers do with Lyin' Dave?"

"Why, we didn't do nothin' with him. After we started up to look at the new trestle we found we were crowded in this little box of a cab, and I let him get off a mile from camp and walk back," the boss exclaimed. "Did anything happen to him?"

"Hit hain't happened to him yit, Boss!" And Draggin' Ellick rose painfully from the stump on which he had dropped to rest.

Then the men in the cab and the sweating huskies on the ground began also to see the light. First they grinned foolishly, then they chuckled, and then they roared until the rocky cañon walls roared back at them.

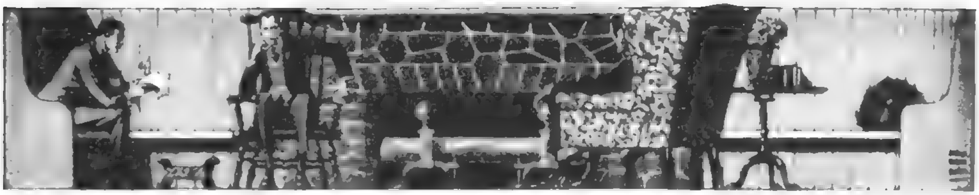
And Draggin' Ellick did just what most inveterate jokers do when the laugh comes the other way. He got mad, not just peeved or provoked or indignant—mad; mad all over. He was so mad he couldn't talk; he couldn't even cuss. He sputtered. Then he clambered up on the tender with the rest of the crew, and sputtered while Number Nine coasted into camp.

THE men at the camp were lined up in front of the mess shack as the would-be rescuers and the would-have-been rescued climbed off the engine. It was a joyous reception. The big roughnecks squealed and howled and bellowed their delight.

But Draggin' Ellick scanned the faces in the crowd for one that was conspicuously missing. "Whar's that thar low-down lyin' skunk?" he shouted above the unabating chorus of mirth.

"He's done went an' gone from here, Ellick," Jeff Lawson replied, with happy tears still streaking his face. "He said he had a good job waitin' fer him with the Ca'liny Spruce, an' he 'lowed hit was a good time to go an' git it. But thar's his compliments he axed us to give ye, to remember him by." And he pointed to a placard crudely lettered on a cracker-box lid tacked above the mess-shack door. It read:

To Draggin Ellick
good by pardner
sorry i cudent think of no biger
lye to tell ye. the feller that
drags last drags the furdest.



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

WE ARE indebted to F. H. Hicks ("Forty Drops," page 49) for an introduction to a most engaging character, Colonel Steptoe, who will appear in these pages, we hope, for quite a while. If you haven't met Colonel Steptoe, turn back and do so now. Then turn back here and meet Mr. Hicks, who is responsible for him:

F. H. Hicks, author of "Forty Drops," who admits that although this picture makes him appear statesmanlike he is not always like that.

> The photograph which you are printing was struck off about a year ago when I thought of entering the Consular Service. Of course you will note the statesmanlike look. Sometimes I'm not like that. Now for a few facts about myself—I am a native of Texas (do not be panicky); at present my people live in El Paso. El Paso, the metropolis of the Southwest, is a city of 100,000 people situated at an altitude of 4,444 feet in a very arid country, but Juarez is just across the Rio Grande. I went to school at the United States Military Academy, and had several years of service in the army—a life which was not taking with me, for I resigned from the army before and after the war. I think I have about recovered from all this.
>
> And then there have been my varied business careers. Once, before the war, I and another young embryo industrial giant had a charming little packing plant in Los Angeles, where amid the flowers and climate we slew great numbers of hogs. No doubt the war saved from extinction the noble race of California porker. After the war I bought alfalfa in Phoenix, Arizona, one very hot summer, and cotton in Calexico, California, one very hot winter. Then for six months I was connected (I think that's the proper term) with a Wall Street brokerage firm which later failed. No—no bucketshop stuff; this was a New York Stock Exchange house. Had it been otherwise, I now might not have to spend all my time in writing some magazine articles and fiction. However, I enjoy the life and perhaps my Wall Street experience will aid me with editors.

EVERYBODY'S has published two stories by Edwina Levin MacDonald—"The Empty House" and "The Log"—and each has brought praise by letter and by word of mouth. Next month there will be another, "The Uncertain Quantity."

Mrs. MacDonald grew up on a plantation on the Red River in Louisiana and married at sixteen after graduation from a young ladies' finishing school. Her husband was the son of a rich man, but when he died she found that while there might be no difference between being the wife of a rich man's son and being the wife of a rich man, there was a vast difference being the widow of a rich man's son and the widow of a rich man. She got nothing. So she packed her trunk and with $200 went to a Texas town and entered a business school. Now she takes up the story:

IF I were going to give this sketch a title, I would call it "I Decide." My career up to the present appears just a series of drastic decisions. First: I decided to become a business woman. After three futile months, I decided I'd better try teaching. Experience taught that I didn't want to be a teacher. And now I decided to go on the stage. I don't know why. Nobody in my family had been even remotely connected with the stage. But I had heard of Charles Frohman. So I obtained a letter "To whom it may concern" from the governor of Louisiana, who was a family friend, and one from the attorney general of Oklahoma, and sent these to Mr. Frohman stating that I wanted to go on the stage, and suggesting that he meet me in Chicago to "talk the matter over." This being about half-way, it seemed fair to me. Daniel Frohman answered that letter in all seriousness, stating that their plays were full and he regretted that it was not convenient for either his brother or himself to meet me in Chicago just at that time.

BUT Mrs. MacDonald got her chance on the stage through an agent whom she describes as "chilly."

As I had always put myself out to be nice to unfortunate people, I put myself out to thaw his unhappy reserve. I dare say he saw through me, for I can still see his eyes begin to twinkle and the vicious manner in which he chewed on his cigar, but he explained to me that he could not send an amateur out with a professional company. I reminded him that all professionals were once amateurs, that somebody was bound to give me a start, and that it might as well be he. My very real sympathy for him may have generated sympathy in his hard-boiled heart; or my naïveté may have intrigued him—anyhow, he finally told me that I might drop in whenever I was downtown. Naturally I was downtown every day. Thus I happened in one Saturday around noon when a frantic manager had to have somebody who was a "quick study" to open with a matinée the following afternoon. The part being thirty-two typewritten "sides," no professional was available who would tackle it. It was a blind character, so if I could learn the lines I would be led through the "business." I did; and the manager was so grateful to me that he kept me all season.

IT WAS when she came to New York at twenty-two that Mrs. MacDonald "learned what rebuff and weariness of soul meant." Her jewelry all went before she got anything. And all this time her work as a writer had been going on.

It began [she says] in our family graveyard on the plantation when I used to hide from my little sister behind the big tombstones to make up new chapters of a never-ending tale with which I regaled the negroes on the place. I called these stories my dreams, and one day it came to me like a flash "to make my dreams pay." Since then I have been sending them to editors.

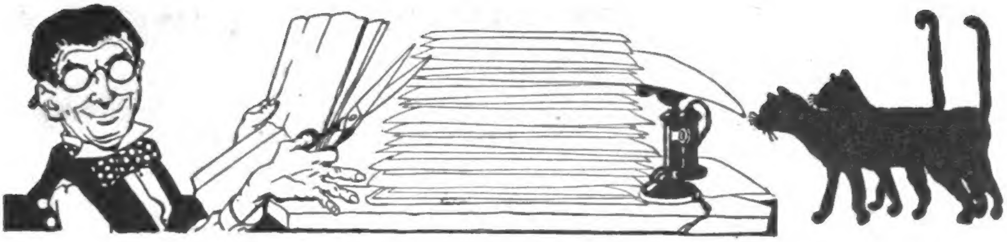
THE Pinkertons, Kathrene and Robert ("The Long Call," page 133), have made an enviable reputation as writers of clean, swiftly moving, outdoor fiction. Here's how they came to go about it.

The usual procedure was reversed in our case. Instead of feeling an urge to write, of being assailed by that very common and irresistible impulse to express ourselves on paper, we were possessed of a longing to live in the Canadian wilderness, to take canoe journeys where few if any white men had ever been, to live an altogether care-free, enjoyable existence in a region where neighbors simply did not exist.

One of us had lived this sort of life for six years. In that time he had held some forty jobs, few of which lasted more than a week. The pay for six days was always enough to buy grub for thirty, and grub for thirty days in the bush is complete luxury. But obviously that was a life suitable only for one completely unattached person. A job in the bush means being away from home, which was beside the program, and we also wanted to live so far away from people there would be no jobs.

Then, when one of us became two, as it was in this case, and the north began shrieking in our ears, we grew desperate. We searched for a job that would support us and yet permit us to remain at home, and by a process of elimination we reached the one possible solution—writing fiction. It never occurred to us to try it out on safe ground. Youth hates caution. We saved enough for railroad fare and initial equipment and started. And we proved our wisdom by selling the first story—and living on moose meat and partridges and rabbits and making our own clothes and going without butter for two years. Then we sold the second.

BUT meanwhile we had no neighbors within sixty miles on three sides and eight and a half on the fourth. We hunted and fished and took long canoe journeys. We raised and drove sleigh dogs, our cabin grew from one room to six, we ran trap lines, we reveled in the luxury of six months without a neighborly call—and at last acquired an interest in writing fiction. This developed into a stern necessity when the two of us became three. After several years the need of schools drove us out; but that original urge remains. Yet now there is coupled with it a new desire, a simple plain handicraftsman's ambition to write a rattling good yarn. After we have done that we will take the proceeds and go back to the bush for a delightful old age.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Jacksonville, Fla.: "*Geter & Baker, Undertakers.*" (E. S. W.)
In South Carolina: "*Neal & Pray, Grocers.*" (P. T.)
In Phila.: "*Jacob Snare, Attorney. Robert Skinner, Associate.*" (P. T.)
At Scooba, Miss.: "*Robert Hare has Rabbitt Saws to Sell.*" (A. L. A.)
In Buffalo: "*H. H. Bury, Undertaker. The Shirton Laundry.*" (W. P. W.)
In Glasgow, Scotland: "*Ogee, Wholesale Only. O. Sherry, Wines & Spirits. D. E. Cameron, Draper & Clothier.*" (A. M. S., GLASGOW.)
Internal Revenue Agent, Bridgeport: "*Louis D. Moonshine.*"
In Woodland, Mich.: "*Mrs. Kida Guy.*"
In Chicago: "*F. L. Fake, Municipal Judge.*"
On Chicago manufacturing plant: "*Helsbells.*"

(In Haverhill, Mass., Dept. Store)

Girls and Womens bathing suits cut down 25 to 50 percent.

Still too old-fashioned for this day and age.

(Corning, Cal., Observer)

Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Morris of San Francisco motored up for a few days visit with their niece Mr. Howard Wilson.

More of that Luther Burbank's doings.

(Chicago Tribune)

TO RENT—SCOTCH Family will share room with young man; board optional. Ph. Van Buren 6587.

Like the settlement worker who found four families living in one room; not crowded "until the family in that corner started to take boarders."

(Humboldt, Kan., Union)

Grover Sheldon and family left Sunday in their big Hudson car for a trip and a two months' visit to the old home in Ohio. These visits, when one has plenty of relatives, are really a well worth-while affair.

And you can usually save enough to take the same kind of trip next year.

(Kelet, Ky., Items)

A great deal of land changed hands here last week.

Soap and water?

(Peoria Star)

Clyde Noble, who recently filed suit for divorce, desires to say that his relations with his mother-in-law were of a pleasant nature.

Where Knighthood still blooms.

(Miami Chief)

It seems that a truck was leaving the Miami Motor Company's filling station and was turning around to go back up the hill, and either did not see Mrs. Daughtee coming toward them, or ignored her one. At any rate it forced her to choose between two evils, either to run into the truck or the parked car, and as the parked car was a Ford she considered it the lesser evil.

The last straw.

(Norwich, Conn. Bulletin)

A rumor in connection with the supply that a dead mule had been found in the water was investigated by water department officials and the rumor found to be false. The carcass of a mule had strayed away and died on the bank, some distance away. (A. H.)

Oh, the careless carcass!

(Falmouth, Ky., Items)

Ray Taylor, farmer, aged 37, died at the Harrison Hospital Tuesday evening from injuries received when he was kicked by a mare Monday afternoon. It is said he was wearing a white shirt, and this with his sudden appearance is thought to have frightened the mare.

Oughter written in advance that he was dressin' up.

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(Owen Sound, Ont., Sun)

MARRIED—Klinker-Cole; at Chicago, June 12th, Hilda G. Cole and Jas. P. Klinker. (F. D.)

What care they for a coal shortage?

(Bayard, Neb., Transcript)

The Beatrice Creamery Station is being transferred to Jake Sourwine's store this week.

Fresh milk?

(Ad in Chicago Tribune)

"Extra Slash in Ladies' Fine Bathing Suits."

Migawd, what to do! what to do!

(Elgin, Ill., Courier)

Chris Schuldt saw smoke coming from the chimney; but he did not mind that, as the family were in the habit on Saturday of firing up in the laundry stove to heat water for the bathtub.

Where the ancient and honorable rite is still observed.

(Ad of Putnam, Conn., Jeweler)

"Rings For All Occasions."

Such as circuses, babies' teething, life-savers.

(Caldwell, Ohio, Press)

GOOD CAR FOR SALE—One —— car with piston rings, two rear wheels, one front spring, has no fenders, seat or plank, burns lots of gas, hard to crank, carbureters busted half-way thru, engine missing; hits on two, three years old, four in the spring; has shock absorbers and everything; radiator's busted, sure does leak, differential dry—you can hear it squeak, ten spokes missing, front all bent, top blown off—tain't worth a cent, got lots of speed, runs like the deuce, burns either gas or tobacco juice, tires all off, been run on the rim, she's a d—— good car for the shape she's in. Inquire of "Dropsey Kelso," Mason Dept. Office hours, 7 to 12, 1 to 5:30.

(Pendleton Ridge Items)

Miss Hazel Draper spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. Tom Wallace.

Miss Ella Mae Draper spent from Thursday until Monday with Miss Inez Blackburn.

Misses Ora and Cora Draper spent Saturday afternoon with Miss Inez Blackburn.

J. T. Draper and son, Shelba, were shopping in Williamstown, Saturday afternoon.

Shelba Draper and sisters, Misses Ora and Cora, spent Sunday afternoon with Mr. and Mrs. L. J. Pike.

Misses Hazel Draper and Cecil Sorrell spent one afternoon last week with Mr. and Mrs. Tom Wallace.

Mr. and Mrs. Marian Sorrell and children entertained Sunday, Mr. and Mrs. William Sorrell and Hazel Draper called in the afternoon.

Almost a "red" letter day for Hazel.

(Lexington Herald)

The results of that questionaire disclosed that of 1,000 women asked whether they had spooned before marriage, 583 admitted they had.

Why did the other 417 lie about it?

(Philadelphia Bulletin)

Mrs. May Ripley, the deputy sheriff, nattily attired with a broad, pleasing smile and her bronze badge of office pinned prominently in view. (BROWNING CLUB, CYNWYD, PA.)

Where were the police?

(Albany Times-Union)

Mrs. Catherine Van Amburgh wishes to deny having left her bed and board. Also stating he had stored her furniture unbeknown to her and he went to live with his mother, 45 Erie Street, North Albany. Also wishes her husband not to interfere with her and to stay away. Mrs. C. Van Amburgh. (D. B. H.)

Where Van has no chance for a come-back.

(Rock Island Argus)

Mr. Hutchins begins a series of woodland lecture recitals with bird songs, whistling solos and fascinating wild life in St. John's Church, Davenport. (MISS E. A.)

Gee! The Dean oughter know about such goings on as *that!*

(Sign on Market Street, St. Louis)

Dr. Alexander Treats All Diseases Including Children. (MRS. C. E. S.)

Rite you are, Doc.

(Milanville, N. Y., Items)

Mr. and Mrs. W. Hansen of Milan Valley passed through here Wednesday.

Mr. and Mrs. C. Williams passed through here Sunday.

Mrs. W. Pink and daughter passed through here Monday.

G. Cotter, our road commissioner, passed through here Saturday.

W. Ostrander passed through here Saturday.

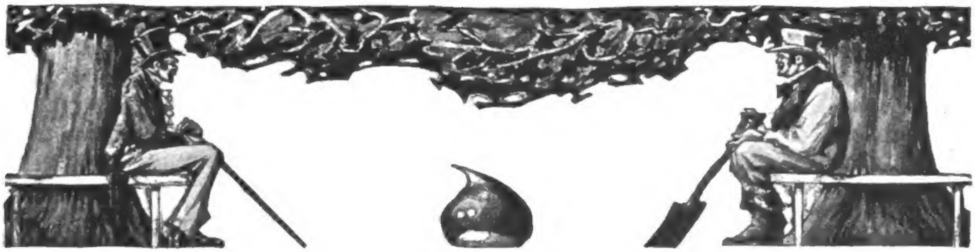
H. Wadlin passed through here one day this week.

As Shakespeare said: "For this relief, much thanks."

(Dallas News)

A PARTICULAR young business man of 26, of the dark type, desires living quarters with a very limited and not over a middle-aged family; congeniality and a Bohemian atmosphere necessary. Box 44-J, News. (MRS. D. D. O.)

Wonder if my house would do? We throw bread on the table, an' everything, but oh, we had hoped for a blond!



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

"HOW would you like a job beating rugs this afternoon, Bobby?" asked Bobby's mother.

"All right," replied Bobby, angelically, "but I'm afraid I can't take it, because Dad gave me twenty-five cents to do something for him this afternoon."

"What was that?"

"Not make a lot of noise."

GENTLE hands were lifting Pat from the wreckage of his automobile, which had just been struck at a grade crossing by a fast passenger train.

"How did it happen?" asked a friend, who was with the rescue party.

"Begorra," fumed Pat, " 'tis more than I can understand. Ye'd have thought that the engineer of the train could have seen me comin' in broad daylight!"

A CERTAIN church clerk, Alexander Gunn by name, had been given an ecclesiastical trial and found guilty of libel. Evidently reluctant to air the details of his report, the scribe of the council entered the following terse minute upon the records:

"A. Gunn: discharged for giving a false report."

THE election was over and Pat's candidate, O'Reilly, had won out over Mike's candidate, O'Toole.

"Now what do yez think of O'Reilly?" crowed Pat.

"What Oi'm thinkin'," replied Mike, "is where would he have been if O'Toole had not got beat!"

THE village tightwad was listening in on the radio at the home of a friend of his. It was Sunday morning and the sermon from the Shady Avenue Baptist Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was being broadcast.

All at once he took the head phones from his ears and started to leave the room. "What's your hurry, Hiram?" demanded Mr. Brown. "Don't you like the sermon?"

"Sermon's all right," said Hiram, "but he just announced they were going to take up the collection. Guess I'll be going."

SOME college girls were giving a show. They wanted no help from the men. Faith had volunteered to act as a scene shifter. The college president dropped in at a rehearsal and it made him smile to hear the following conversation:

"Faith! Faith!"

"Yes?"

"Come over here, please. I want you to move these mountains."

"WHAT made you think this gentleman was drunk?" asked the judge.

"Well, yer Honor, 'e was 'aving a bit of a fight with his bootlegger."

"But that doesn't prove he was drunk, officer."

"No, but there wasn't any bootlegger there, yer Honor."

YOUNG MAN—So Miss Ethel is your oldest sister? Who comes after her?

SMALL BOY—Nobody ain't come yet; but Pa says the first fellow that comes can have her.

AN OLD negro minister visiting in a small Southern city had to catch a train quickly and approached a white cabby with a ramshackle vehicle.

"I've never driven a darky in my cab yet," the cabman said, "and I don't know how to begin now."

"Well, I'll show you how," said the fertile dominie. "You get in the back and I'll drive and we'll soon be there."

The cabby yielded, got his quarter and the minister got his train.

A PHILADELPHIA lawyer tells of an attorney who was arguing a case before a certain judge, between whom and himself there was no love lost. The judge listened for a while with ill-concealed impatience, and then burst out with:

"Nonsense, sir! You have your points of law all upside down!"

"I don't doubt that they seem so to your Honor," replied the attorney, with a respectful bow, "but you'll think differently when your Honor is reversed."

IT WAS the young candidate's first campaign and his very first political speech. He was much encouraged by the hearty welcome extended by the local committee and delighted by the elaborate preparations for the meeting. There was even a band to play on the stand before the speech.

At last the chairman came forward and addressed the crowd as follows:

"Fellow citizens, we have with us today a young man that is destined to take high place in the ranks of our beloved party. He comes to tell us of the burning issues that confront us, and his fame as an orator has, of course, preceded him. He will now address you, and when he has finished, the band will call you together again."

TWO Irishmen met after a year's separation, and were exchanging gossip.

"And how is Terence O'Toole these days?" asked Tim.

Mike shook his head dolefully.

"Ah, Tim, it's a dyin' mon Terence is."

"Dyin'? And phwat makes ye think that, Mike?"

"Why, he's gettin' so thin! Now, you're thin, Tim, and I'm awfully thin, but sure poor Terence is thinner than both of us put together."

A WILY old Scot at one time had occasion for a long railroad journey. Scarcely had he become comfortably settled in a com of the smoker when a stranger entered and seated himself by his side. For a time there was silence between them, while from all sides clouds of tobacco smoke rose into the already heavily laden atmosphere.

The stranger, seeing a cigar in the old man's pocket, turned to him and said:

"My man, why don't you smoke your cigar?"

The old fellow looked about cautio before replying.

"Hush, mon!" he whispered. "Can nae see I'm getting all this smoke free?"

"NOW it's jist like I was a-tellin' ye," a grizzled old Irishman to a group of wor men. "Oncet when my gang was help put up a skyscraper, I fell fer three stor an' it didn't hurt me nary a bit."

Here the stranger who had paused listen remonstrated.

"But how could a person fall for three stories and not be hurt?" he sternly inquired.

"Well," replied the veteran, a twink creeping into his eye, "you've already fall fer one, an' I guess fallin' fer two mo won't hurt ye."

THEY were discussing ways and me of getting down off an elephant.

"Well, how do you get down?" as Bob.

"You climb down, of course."

"No," replied his friend Tom.

"Well, you grease his sides and s down," suggested the other.

"Wrong again," insisted Tom.

"Then you take a ladder if one is han and get down," was the next suggestion.

"No."

"Well, you slide down his trunk."

"No, you donkey! You don't get do off an elephant. You get it off a duck."

SIX-YEAR-OLD Freddy, bred in the ci was on his first visit to his uncle's farm. breakfast he heard that his uncle's Jer cow had been stolen during the night.

"That's a good joke on the man who st her," was Freddy's comment.

"Why?" asked his uncle.

"Why, just before supper last night hired man took all the milk out of her."